

University of Chester

Proposed Access Agreement with the Office of Fair Access

A Fee limits

In accordance with the guidelines issued by OFFA in its circular of November 2004, University of Chester proposes to levy the fee of £3000 per student on all full-time courses for which it is responsible. This includes all eligible programmes of study delivered in partner colleges under franchise from University of Chester. Accordingly, the University has completed the pro-forma provided for estimating the amount of additional fee income anticipated and the estimated amount to be invested in access measures.

B Amounts of additional fee income to be spent on access measures

See Annex B attached to this document.

C (i) Bursaries and other financial support for students - Undergraduates

University of Chester commits itself to supplementing the maintenance grant of £2,700 received by the poorest students by a sum of £300 in order to make good the difference between state support and the fees which the University will charge. Over and above this commitment to the poorest students, the University wishes to continue to attract students whose levels of income are modest and who are already under-represented in higher education nationally. It therefore proposes to adopt a bursary scheme which will operate on an incremental scale for all those students who receive a Higher Education Maintenance Grant at whatever level. Currently, no such bursary scheme exists.

Students in that category will be assessed on the basis of income and will receive bursaries according to the following banded scale, using the amount of HEMG they receive as the determining factor. The University will in future years adjust its scales in line with any adjustment to the HEMG. Approximate income ranges at present values are shown for information only:

HE Maintenance Grant Entitlement	University of Chester Bursary	Approximate Income Level
£2,700	£1350	Less than £15,200
£1,750 to £2,699	£900	£15,200 – 21,185k
£1 to £1,749	£450	£21,185 – £33,000

Income levels are at current levels and will be updated and possibly revised by the DfES.

Bursary allocations will be determined using Student Loans Company data and making use of the model bursary scheme being developed by UUK. All bursaries will be paid as bursary grants and not as fee waivers. All UK students in receipt of the HEMG will be eligible for the bursary scheme. The University estimates that this scheme will account for approximately 29% of the revenue that accrues from additional fee income.

The University proposes to adopt a broad-based bursary scheme in order to encourage applications from students of limited means across the whole of its provision. University of Chester has major campuses in Chester and Warrington which draw on a wide range of socio-economic groups. The University has stated in its Corporate Plan 2002-07 that it seeks to become a regional teaching university, serving local communities. This declared mission of widening educational opportunities calls for a system of financial support which is calculated both to protect the University's existing pool of applicants and further to widen that pool.

C (ii) Bursaries and other financial support for students – PGCE

University of Chester commits itself to supplementing the maintenance grant of £2,700 received by the poorest students by a sum of £300 in order to make good the difference between state support and the fees which the University will charge.

D Provision of information to students

University of Chester's marketing department has much experience in issuing advice and guidance to prospective students and in raising the aspirations of under-represented groups. It recognises that the key to encouraging applications from those groups is often the provision of comprehensive and intelligible information about the costs and benefits of studying in higher education. University of Chester will therefore ensure that students intending to apply for 2006 will be able to access information about the University's arrangements for fees and bursaries through its website. Additionally, an information leaflet will be prepared and distributed as a supplementary to the prospectus. The University commits itself to providing students with information relating to the full, aggregate costs of additional fees over their entire course. This information will include a statement referring to any adjustment that may be permitted in order to take account of inflation

Because the University is committed to increasing the number of applicants from under-represented groups, it will be pro-active in targeting information to those groups through a number of channels. First, it will provide specific written guidance on costs at all recruitment events at which it is represented. Second, it will use its extensive links with partner schools and colleges in order to ensure that the information available to students of those schools and colleges is properly understood. Third, the University is a lead institution in an area Aimhigher scheme and proposes to be the lead institution in a new Lifelong Learning Initiative for Cheshire and Warrington. These projects aimed at widening participation will give the University an excellent channel of communication through which to reach potential applicants who might otherwise remain unaware of the benefits and costs of higher education.

E Outreach work

The University believes that the scale on which it intends to offer bursaries to students will, in conjunction with its current and planned outreach activities, represent a robust system for ensuring that educational opportunities are made widely available. It therefore does not propose at this stage to devote a specific proportion of additional fee income, other than the bursary scheme, to those outreach activities. This decision should be seen in the context of a well-resourced marketing and recruitment operation which is already geared to widening participation. That operation is linked to the activity of the University's Director of Widening Participation, who oversees the University's involvement in the area Aimhigher project and other outreach activities such as the Hefce/ESF funded Summer Schools for young people who might otherwise gain no experience of a higher education environment.

A large part of the activity described above is currently targeted at priority schools in the Cheshire and Warrington areas which are located in neighbourhoods from which there is a low participation rate in HE (in the lowest quartile), and which have a low profile of GCSE attainment. It is intended that this level and type of activity, which includes taster days and mentoring projects, will be maintained. In addition, the University aims further to extend its outreach work by also targeting a greater number of further education colleges in low participation areas, for example in Education Action Zones. Existing links and agreements with further education colleges have already contributed signally to the diversification of the University's applications and intake, both in terms of entry qualifications and social background. In recognition of the success of these links, University of Chester is likely to respond positively to requests from a number of its key partner FE colleges to move to Associate College status, a central purpose of which would be to increase still further the 'pull-through' of students from further to higher education.

The strength and range of the University's existing outreach work underlies its decision to devote the whole of its spending on widening participation from additional fee income to the bursary scheme.

The University does not propose as part of its access agreement to provide bursaries for part-time students. However, the University does intend to extend its outreach and networking activities with local partners to promote progression routes and HE opportunities for potential applicants who (a) are undertaking vocational and/or employment-linked pathways and (b) have educational or socio-demographic backgrounds associated with low participation in HE.

F Milestones

The University has increased its portfolio of vocational programmes in recent years and these have already provided a basis for attracting students with non-standard entry requirements. As the University increases the number of FE institutions with which it has progression agreements and confers Associate College status on those most closely linked to it, it anticipates that vocational progression routes will become more extensively and more effectively used. Associate College status is planned for Warrington Collegiate FE College and West Cheshire FE College by September 2005.

University of Chester currently has formal Progression Agreements with 6 FE colleges, 6 schools and 3 sixth form colleges (total: 15). It aims to both maintain and consolidate its current level of engagement under the Aimhigher initiative and furthermore to extend its Progression Agreements to schools and colleges beyond its Aimhigher area. The University has set itself the target for this of having increased the number of its Progression Agreements with schools and colleges, targeting primarily those in low participation neighbourhoods, by 6 by the year 2008 (target total: 21) and by a further 5 by the year 2011 (target total: 26).

In particular, the University aims to have improved participation rates in undergraduate programmes of young full-time entrants from National Statistics – Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) groups 4-7 and low participation neighbourhoods within the sub-region by 2008, and to seek a further increase by 2011. Performance indicators based on HESA statistics will be used. The University's current PI's for the year 2002/03, as published by HESA, are shown below:

		University of Chester	Benchmark
Young first degree entrants	Social class	32.4%	32.5%
	Low participation neighbourhood	18.3%	14.7%
Young full-time undergraduate entrants	Social class	32.8%	33.5%
	Low participation neighbourhood	18.8%	15.7%
Mature entrants	Low participation neighbourhood + no previous HE qualification	31.2%	21.0%

All low participation indicators are judged by HESA to be significantly better than the benchmark. The University regards its success in attracting students from low participation neighbourhoods as encouraging but recognises that it has further to go in attracting a higher number of ethnic minority students. Within its general strategy widening participation strategy, it will therefore seek to identify particular measures aimed at increasing the number of suitably qualified applicants from ethnic minority groups.

The University will extend partnership and network relationships in order to enhance access and progression opportunities for those with employment-related qualifications and experience by 2007/8.

G Institutional Monitoring Arrangements

Progress against targets and milestones will be monitored by the University's Widening Participation Strategy Group, making use of the annual return to Hefce and public HESA data.

To assist in this the University also undertakes to develop its data analysis and monitoring of application against recruitment patterns from under-represented groups, across its 7 schools of study, including in particular the distribution of those from lower-income groups. UCAS information on social class of applicants will be

used. The University will also develop its use of Hefce Polar data on low-participation neighbourhoods in order to cover all entrants, including those who are outside the UCAS system.

The University will develop the use of its MIS to enhance tracking and monitoring of the profile across the institution of applicants from under-represented groups, particularly those from target schools and colleges against the corresponding take-up of places.