

Suffolk College

Access Agreement

This agreement sets out how Suffolk College will safeguard and promote fair access to its HEFCE-funded full-time undergraduate programmes.

Introduction

Suffolk College is the second largest provider of higher education within the further education sector, providing learning opportunities for approximately 4,000 higher education students of whom nearly 2,000 are full-time. For the past twelve years the College has offered degrees awarded by the University of East Anglia and is accredited by the University to develop and validate its own undergraduate provision. Subject based reviews of the higher education provision at the College by the Quality Assurance Agency have resulted in excellent outcomes with confidence in standards and consistent top level 'commendable' grades for teaching, learning and student progression. Suffolk College has rapidly expanded the provision of higher education during the last fifteen years to meet local and regional needs. The higher education sector of the College's income is derived from a combination of HEFCE, the Workforce Development Confederation (Department of Health funded) and student tuition fees. There is a wide range of degree level provision funded by HEFCE and health professional courses for nurses and midwives together with a major contract for radiography across the Sub Region. The College is replacing HNDs and HNCs with Foundation Degrees and is targeting this provision to build on Work Based Learning and employer-led vocational education and training.

Widening participation is a central to the College's mission and our higher education student body reflects this. Amongst our full-time HEFCE-funded students, there is a spread of socio-economic status with 30% coming from routine and semi-routine occupations, 8% from lower supervisory and technical occupations, 50% from intermediate occupations, and 12% from managerial and professional occupations. 55% of the students are mature (over 21) with 65% being female and 36% male. 7.7% come from ethnic minorities (against a background figure for Suffolk of 2.8%). Last year, 41% of students had full state support with their tuition fees, 11% had partial state support, and 48% paid their own fees. 70% of entrants had non-A-level entry qualifications. 65% come from within the county of Suffolk where forty-seven wards have been designated as being within the most deprived 10% nationally (Indices of Deprivation 2000).

Retention and achievement rates are high. In 2003/4, HEFCE-funded programmes in-course retention was 88% and achievement was 94%. One of our key strengths is the quality of our student support and this aspect of our provision contributes significantly to the retention and success rates of our students.

The College is currently engaged (in partnership with the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex) in planning a joint initiative to enhance higher education provision in Suffolk. This initiative, entitled 'University Campus Suffolk' has substantial potential to widen access and opportunity within the east of England. This means that the access agreement may not run the full five year term and may be replaced by a University Campus Suffolk agreement (please see Appendix for details of the context and plans for the future).

Fee limits

Suffolk College will charge up to the maximum fee permissible (£3,000 in 2006/7) for its full-time undergraduate courses funded by HEFCE. This recognises the high quality University of East Anglia awards we offer.

Amounts of additional fee income to be spent on access measures

In order to enhance access to our courses (and retention and achievement rates) we intend to use approximately 37% of additional fee income on bursaries for students from low income homes. We estimate that the additional fee income in 2006/7 will be circa £837,000. In the first year of operation of the bursary scheme some £309,000 will be distributed, on a sliding scale, to students in receipt of state support. It is estimated that in 2006/07 about 245 students will receive bursaries. This number will rise in subsequent years, with potentially 500 in receipt in 2007/08 and 700 by 2008/09.

Bursaries and other financial support

The College will establish a bursary scheme which provides generous payments to less well off students towards costs associated with their course of study. For students in receipt of maximum state support the payment will be £1350 annually, which is 4.5 times the minimum statutory requirement of £300.

State Maintenance Grant	Suffolk College Bursary
£	£
2000 to 2700	1350
1000 to 1999	1000
1 to 999	500
0	0

Bursaries will be paid annually in a single payment to students whose financial assessments confirm their eligibility. It is expected that September starters will receive their payment in February and February starters will receive their payment in the following September. The bursary scheme will be kept as simple as possible in order to minimise administration costs and maximise the amount of money passed on to students.

Provision of information to students

The College undertakes to inform prospective applicants and students of course fees clearly by means of widely-available publications, including the College's website, its printed prospectuses and associated documentation. Applicants will also be advised of the estimated associated costs of studying on particular courses during the application process along with advice on the support available both at the College and more broadly. We have a well-established Student Support Service including specific student financial and welfare advice and a pro-active Higher Education Recruitment and Admissions team who support and advise applicants through the admissions process. The cost of tuition fees for the whole duration of the course will be confirmed in writing before the applicant enrolls as a student.

Particular care will be taken with promoting the bursary scheme so that prospective students will be made aware of the immediate financial support available to them while, at the same time, it is made clear that payment of tuition fees is deferred until they are earning at least £15,000.

Outreach work

The College undertakes to continue its current pattern of outreach work which is summarised below. The College does not intend to allocate any of its additional fee income to augment this activity in the foreseeable future. In being a further education institution in a county without a higher education institution, meeting the widening participation agenda has evolved naturally. We have always worked hard to raise the educational aspirations of the local and regional population and have had particular success with providing higher education opportunities for 'second chance' students. The plans for the future direction of the College (the Appendix refers) mean that, from 2007/8, it is likely that the configuration of the new campus, with its associated linked local learning centres, will provide an even more explicitly articulated outreach framework.

Current activities include:

- Open events, information days, taster sessions for local school pupils, our own FE and Community Education students, the general public, applicants to our HE courses, sixth form tutors/heads and Connexions staff
- School/FE sector/Community group liaison with HE tutors offering talks, lectures, exchange teaching
- Employer liaison with local employers involved in the design and delivery of programmes, in particular Foundation Degrees, employer membership of Course Committees, and visits to employers
- Outreach activities of the Suffolk Institute of Technology (the College in partnership with UEA was successful in its bid for a New Technology Institute) which has a central town-centre site, a presence at Ipswich Railway Station and significant centres at Hadleigh and Framlingham and a research facility at BT Adastral Park at Martlesham. These local

learning centres encourage progression from FE/Learn Direct courses to HE

- Active participation in Suffolk Aim Higher and Young People into Higher Education (YPIHE) programmes
- Sponsorship of the Ipswich Town Football Club (ITFC) Learning Centre and involvement in the ITFC Education and Sports Trust
- Targeted mailshots to pre-application school pupils about courses in which they have indicated an interest
- Regular column about the College's activities in the local press and a systematic promotional campaign throughout the year, using press releases, good news stories and advertising across the region.
- Regular evaluation of effectiveness of outreach activities and review of practice

Milestones

1. The College will seek to maintain its current proportion of students in receipt of state support for the duration of this agreement:
 - 41% of new full-time undergraduate students to be in receipt of full state support
 - 11% of new full-time undergraduate students to be in receipt of partial state support.
2. The College will seek to maintain and enhance the in-course retention and achievement rates of full-time undergraduate students year on year (the College is required to report these indicators to the University of East Anglia in the annual Accreditation Report). In 2003/4 the in-course retention rate was 88% and the in-course achievement rate was 94%.
 - In 2006/07 the in-course retention rate to be 90%
 - In 2008/09 the in-course retention rate to be 92%
 - In 2010/11 the in-course retention rate to be 94%
 - In 2006/07 the in-course achievement rate to be 95%
 - In 2008/09 the in-course achievement rate to be 96%
 - In 2010/11 the in-course achievement rate to be 97%
3. The College will seek to maintain the current broad mix of its undergraduate student body.

Institutional monitoring arrangements

The College undertakes to monitor compliance with the commitments made under this agreement. The following indicators will be monitored annually:

- The number of students taking up bursaries and the pattern of awards
- The retention and achievement rates of full-time undergraduates

- The socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, age and entry qualifications of its new entrants

The monitoring will be undertaken via annual reports to the College's Academic Board: Quality Standards Committee, the Academic Standards Committee of the College's Corporation, and the Senate of the University of East Anglia via the Annual Accreditation Report.

How existing activity is being complemented

The College does not currently offer bursaries to its full-time undergraduate students. Therefore the introduction of a bursary scheme will be additional to our existing access activity which to date has focused on the outreach activities outlined above, the provision of courses to meet local and regional demand, and excellent student support. We anticipate that a generous bursary scheme will prove attractive to students, particularly to those who wish to study locally for well-regarded University of East Anglia awards.

APPENDIX

Context

Suffolk has no university and is the only county in England with a population of over half a million without a higher education institution and one of only four counties without a university. Thus Suffolk College plays a significant role in the provision of higher education in the County. Suffolk is an expanding county with a population in 2004 of almost 670,000 and growing at about 1% each year. The population is richly diverse. Around half the residents live in rural, often widely scattered communities and the remainder in the coastal areas and towns. Ipswich is the largest town with over 117,000 inhabitants. Minority ethnic groups constitute 2.8% of the population. Demographic trends suggest the rising demand for post-16 provision over the next five years, which should augment the numbers eligible for higher education (Census 2001). There is considerable variation in economic prosperity across Suffolk with many areas being described as having 'more features of advantage than disadvantage' (Suffolk County Council, 2004, P2); however forty-seven wards in Suffolk have been designated as being within the most deprived 10% nationally (Indices of Deprivation 2000). Ipswich is a thriving seaport and home to BT Research and Development Headquarters and several high technology companies at Adastral Park, one of Europe's largest centres of ICT R&D. Suffolk College is closely engaged with the Haven Gateway Initiative, a consortium of businesses and local authorities focusing on economic development round the ports of Felixstowe, Ipswich and Harwich. In Ipswich itself unemployment is slightly above the national average and the indices of deprivation (2004) show Ipswich as having the greatest overall level of deprivation within Suffolk and in being the third most deprived district within the Region. In general, however, employment, particularly in the service and technological industries, is buoyant. Suffolk College works closely with Ipswich Borough Council in working towards enhancing the skills and knowledge of those working in and around the Town and the current Mayor and the Chief Executive are Members of the Governing Body.

In being predominantly a rural county there are issues around employment, health care and education and Suffolk College has served the County well over the last ten years in expanding Higher Education to meet local and regional needs. Employment is growing in Suffolk at a substantially faster rate than in the Region and the County as a whole, with the fastest growth being recorded in Ipswich and the Mid Suffolk catchment areas served by Suffolk College.

Participation in full-time education by 16 year olds in Suffolk grew rapidly between 1986 and 1993. Since then the participation rate has remained at a

fairly constant level at approximately 72%, relatively low for a prosperous shire County with centres of major economic development. Achievement levels at GCSE place Suffolk are well above the national average. However, at A level, students perform less well. Suffolk's post-16 attainment levels combined with static levels of post-16 participation have added impetus to 14-19 curriculum development and innovation. As more young people study on the developing programmes the demand for HE provision that reflects this diversity is likely to increase. The higher education participation rate for Suffolk as a percentage of the total population is 1.77%, significantly below the rate for England which is 2.26% (HESA, 2001/2). The under-provision of higher education is a key feature in Suffolk's relatively low HE participation with Suffolk being a net exporter of graduates.

Plans for the future

In response to the issues identified above the Corporation of Suffolk College recently approved an academic strategy to work towards the development of a new building and facilities for Suffolk College as a predominantly further education institution and to establish a separate but closely linked University Campus in Ipswich. The University Campus is to be facilitated by transferring higher education contracts from HEFCE and the Workforce Development Confederation to a partnership of the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex.

The agreed strategy has widespread stakeholder support. The Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council chairs a Stakeholders Group with representatives from HEFCE, LSC, Ipswich Borough Council, the East of England Development Agency, St Edmundsbury District, Waveney District, UEA, the University of Essex and the Suffolk Development Agency. The Stakeholder Group is actively engaged in supporting and driving the strategy forward for the longer-term benefits of Suffolk and the wider Region.

The two Universities are currently bringing together proposals to submit to HEFCE, paralleling proposals being made to the LSC in respect of the new build FE College on approximately the same timescale. It is anticipated that the College could be in a position to hand over the higher education contracts and associated resources to the Universities of East Anglia and Essex in 2007/8. New buildings could be available for both the University Campus and Further Education developments for occupancy during 2007/8.