

ACCESS AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD AND THE OFFICE FOR FAIR ACCESS

Effective October 2008 – October 2011

INTRODUCTION

1. This agreement sets out the University's plans for fee levels and financial support for the cycle 2008-11, in respect of full-time Home/EU undergraduate students (for fees) and full-time UK undergraduate students (for financial aid). It also gives an overview of the University's widening access activities, outlining its strategy for the period covered by this agreement.
2. The University reserves the right to amend this agreement in the light of changes in national policy which may have a significant impact on the activities and objectives described herein.

OVERVIEW

3. The University of Oxford has, for many years, undertaken a large number of widening access activities, designed to ensure that those students with the potential to benefit from an Oxford undergraduate education are encouraged to apply for a place, and more generally to encourage aspirations to participate in Higher Education among under-represented groups. These activities are organised at a number of levels by the central administration, colleges, departments, and student groups
4. Undergraduate Admissions and Student Funding Services are the central University units responsible for coordinating Oxford's access activities, and the provision of financial aid respectively. Staff in colleges, divisions, departments and faculties, and student-led organisations also work towards widening access to Oxford, and a conservative estimate of the total resource being committed to these activities is £1.8M per year.
5. Over the next 3-5 years, the University aims to increase the proportions of students from under-represented groups applying to and studying at Oxford, and to remove as far as possible financial barriers to entry to Oxford. In order to achieve these aims, Undergraduate Admissions will coordinate access activities across the various parts of the University, and develop a network of internal and external partnerships to maximise the social and geographical coverage of its work.
6. The University will expand the provision of financial aid to benefit more students. This represents further enhancement of what is currently the most generous bursary scheme for undergraduate students of any UK university.
7. This document focuses on the work of the central University, in terms of financial aid, and widening access activity. The work of the colleges, and any financial aid disbursed by them, lies outside the remit of this agreement (although it is referred to from time to time).

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Fees payable from October 2009

8. From 2009-10, the University will increase its fee for HEU undergraduate students studying for their first undergraduate degree to the maximum level permitted in line with the Government's guidelines. This means that for 2009-10, the fee for these students will be £3,225. The fees will apply to all three and four year undergraduate courses, and will also include Medicine, on the understanding that the Government will pay the fees of medical students in years 5 and 6. HEU students undertaking a second undergraduate degree and who are ineligible for public support as a result of ELQ regulations will be charged fees at the appropriate Islands rate.
9. HEU students on PGCE courses will be charged fees of £3,225.

Bursaries and other financial support for students

10. There is no separate application form for a student to be considered for an Oxford Opportunity Bursary (OOB). In order to be assessed for a bursary under one of the schemes outlined below, students must apply for government support using the standard processes for there are and allow their household income data to be shared with the University. EU students and students studying for an equivalent or lower level qualification (ELQ) are not eligible for these bursaries.

Entrants in 2006 and 2007

11. Students who entered the University in 2006 and 2007 will benefit from the OOB scheme as described in previous Access Agreements. This means that all Home students in receipt of a full HE Maintenance Grant (or equivalent) will receive a full OOB, and all Home students in receipt of a partial HE Maintenance Grant (or equivalent) will receive a partial OOB. The full OOB is worth up to £4,095 in the first year of study and up to £3,225 p.a. thereafter, with a minimum award of £100. EU students are not eligible to receive an award under this scheme.

Entrants in 2008 and 2009

12. Students who enter the University from 2008 will benefit from a revised OOB scheme which takes into consideration the changes to government support for these students. In 2009, Home undergraduate students with a residual household income (RHI) below £25,000 will receive an award of £3,225 p.a. Home students with an RHI between £25,000 and £50,000 will receive a partial award, with the minimum award being worth £200. In addition, all Home students with an RHI below £18,000 will receive an extra award of £875 in the first year of their course, such that the maximum total award for a student in the first year of their course will be £4,100. Students will be assessed for a bursary for each year of their course. EU students are not eligible to receive an award under this scheme.

Provision of information on bursaries and financial support

13. The University uses a variety of methods to provide prospective students with information about tuition fees, bursaries and general financial support. Information is provided on the University's website, in its publications, at Open Days, at widening participation events, and in letters to accepted applicants. On the University website students and their parents can find general information about the costs of studying at

Oxford, the tuition fees and the Oxford Opportunity Bursary scheme. The bursary scheme has its own dedicated website, www.oxfordopportunity.com. The information on the website is reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that it is as accurate, relevant and accessible as possible. This information is reinforced by that available in the prospectus and in the dedicated funding publication *Oxford University Undergraduate Finance Guide* which is available through the website and from Undergraduate Admissions.

14. The University runs Open Days for prospective students and their parents at which presentations are made about Government and University support for studying at Oxford. It also runs regional conferences around the country in collaboration with Cambridge University where similar presentations are given. At a more tailored level, students participating in sustained contact programmes attend workshops on student finance and bursaries. Student Funding Services is continuing to work with Undergraduate Admissions to increase the number of tailored workshops included in its sustained contact programmes.
15. We are gathering feedback from students involved in sustained contact programmes and other similar activities to assess the usefulness and effectiveness of these sessions.
16. Once students have been offered a place, they are sent letters about University tuition fees, Government funding, and the Oxford Opportunity Bursary scheme as part of the pack informing them that they have been offered a place at the University. They are also sent similar information in late August in their confirmation of place welcome packs. Students who have been awarded an Oxford Opportunity Bursary are sent a letter notifying them of their bursary from September each year.
17. Student Funding Services regularly reviews which students have been awarded bursaries and compares this to data provided by the SLC to contact students in receipt of a maintenance grant to encourage them to provide the data that is needed to assess their eligibility for a bursary.

ACCESS AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

18. The overall objective of Oxford's access work is to give particular priority to increasing the proportion of applications from highly able and appropriately qualified students from state schools and colleges.
19. In setting itself this objective, the University recognises that the problems relating to access to higher education are complex and deep-seated, and beyond the capability of the University to solve by itself. It requires the input of all parts of the organisation to address, and indeed the input of agencies external to the University. Oxford is committed to playing its part in addressing these issues, by focusing on two areas, corresponding to factors of supply and factors of demand. These are:
 - (a) Increasing the number of high-quality applications from target groups.
 - (b) Ensuring fair admissions processes.

20. In addition, the University carries out work to increase aspirations to enter higher education generally for students from under-represented groups, working in partnership with other organisations.
21. Detailed operational plans are currently being developed to achieve the University's objectives in relation to widening access, as set out in this agreement.

Principles

22. A number of principles underpin the University's work in relation to widening access:
 - (a) The development and targeting of activities to widen access should be underpinned by rigorous evidence and data analysis.
 - (b) Activities should be thoroughly evaluated, using quantitative and qualitative methods.
 - (c) Expanded multi-agency working will increase resources and impact, and the development of partnerships is crucial to success in widening access.

Overview of activities

23. The precise schedule of activities run by Undergraduate Admissions will change from year-to-year, in the light of emerging evidence as to effectiveness. Colleges and departments run additional events, information on which is set out below.
24. The University has also recently taken steps to ensure that its admissions processes are fair and consistent. Measures include:
 - (a) Developing and implementing a Common Framework of undergraduate admissions processes, within subjects, across Oxford.
 - (b) Discontinuing the Oxford Application Form because it is no longer required as part of the undergraduate admissions process.
 - (c) For the 2008/09 undergraduate admissions cycle relevant contextual information on applicants will be made available across Oxford.
 - (d) Making available annual statistics on applications and admissions.
 - (e) Improving the transparency of information provided to all potential applicants and their schools.
25. Oxford's Colleges run a number of access programmes. The most significant of these is the Further Education Access Initiative, which runs a large number of visits to FE institutions around the country and provides support schemes for applicants from such institutions. Colleges also provide facilities and support for centrally-run access initiatives.
26. Many Academic Departments also run their own access/outreach programmes, and some have staff with specific responsibility for such initiatives. There are also staff specifically employed to carry out access work at the divisional level. Faculty and

academic staff are also closely involved in providing facilities and teaching expertise for the delivery of centrally-organised activities with a subject-specific focus.

27. The University is fortunate in incorporating a number of internationally-significant museums and collections, such as the Ashmolean Museum, Museum of Natural History, Pitt Rivers Museum and Botanic Garden. Education staff from these institutions are closely involved in many access activities across Oxford.
28. Student organisations, including college bodies and the central Students' Union (OUSU) are an essential resource for all access activity. Students play a key role in delivering a number of programmes and activities in Oxford and across the country. The central Access staff have developed a new set of policies and volunteer training guidelines to ensure that students can participate in access work with maximum levels of professionalism and effectiveness.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

29. The University is developing an approach to the design and delivery of its outreach activities and bursary scheme that will enable systematic evaluation. Specifically, the University will seek to identify:
 - (a) The extent to which activities are effectively reaching the target groups described above.
 - (b) The impact of these activities on participants, measured against intended outcomes.
30. As a first step towards these aims, Undergraduate Admissions has created an online database that enables the University to capture information about access activities being hosted across the collegiate university.
31. The University will continue to publish its admissions statistics annually online and in print form. The University will annually review its performance in terms of national UCAS datasets and HESA performance indicators. The University will also report to HEFCE and OFFA on its widening access activity through the annual monitoring process. In addition, the University is working to develop its own benchmarks and baselines for performance monitoring purposes.
32. In terms of governance, University access activities are overseen primarily by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC), which is a Committee of Council (the primary policy-making body of the University), and chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). In addition, access matters are discussed at the Admissions Committee, chaired by the Principal of Mansfield College, and comprising Tutors for Admissions from each of the Oxford Colleges with University representation.

Financial Evaluation

33. A range of projects will be undertaken over the course of the specified time period, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Oxford Opportunity Bursary scheme in terms of removing barriers to entry to Oxford for students from low-income households. The University will consider, for example, levels of student indebtedness amongst the

cohort of current bursary holders (since fear of debt potentially acts as a barrier to entry), and the size and socio-economic composition of this cohort. In addition, the University will continue to monitor the effectiveness of information and publicity in raising awareness about the scheme among potential applicants to Oxford.

Evaluation of Access Activities and Outcomes

34. As far as possible, access activities will be designed with clear intended outcomes in relation to the objectives described above, and will be evaluated against these outcomes. The University is developing processes for capturing and monitoring appropriate participant data, and will consider the most effective ways to measure the impact of access initiatives on factors such as applications and acceptances to Oxford, and levels of academic attainment. This approach will be underpinned by the rigorous analysis of quantitative and qualitative information from individuals, and the use of national and institutional datasets. The University will draw on expertise from external parties where appropriate.

Milestones

35. The University will monitor progress towards achieving benchmarks in terms of the representation of its undergraduate student population. The benchmarks will be internally-developed, taking account of existing external data such as HESA PIs, and will be established with regard to the following groups:
 - (a) State school students.
 - (b) Students from NS-SEC groups 4-7.
 - (c) Students from black and minority ethnic groups.
36. The University will also monitor the admission and progress of care leavers.
37. In each case, the benchmarks will be adjusted to take into account the specific academic requirements for entry to Oxford (i.e., normally 3 A grades at A-level, in subjects appropriate for our courses, excluding General Studies).
38. Progress will be measured against the operational plans which are being developed with respect of each of these objectives.
39. Work is proceeding internally on developing benchmarks to track progress against these operations plans. In order to support this work an Access and Admissions Subgroup for the EPSC will be set up. In the meantime, the University will continue to use its existing milestone of increasing applications from the state sector by an average of 270 (4.25%) per year, over a five-year period (with 2005 as the base year). In addition, the University will continue to monitor the number of students from low income households in its full-time undergraduate student population, and will look for year-on-year increases in this number.

Funding support for activities

40. The overall operational budget for the central Access activities for the current academic year is £615.7K. Funding for this operation is provided from a number of sources:

- (a) HEFCE WP funding
 - (b) General University income
 - (c) Other external grant funding (including Aimhigher)
 - (d) External donations
41. In addition, Undergraduate Admissions conducts further outreach activity with all schools and colleges, the overall budget for which is £352.5K.
 42. The University has committed to fund the Oxford Opportunity Bursary at around £6.4M in steady-state (i.e., by 2011-12). This is equivalent to roughly 30% of the net additional income from variable fees.
 43. In addition, colleges, divisions, and departments also support financial aid for students, and the operating costs of outreach activity, from their own funds.