

University of Chester

Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreement 2010



University of
Chester

University of Chester

Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access - 2010

1. Background

The University of Chester has an established commitment to widening participation and works proactively to extend opportunities to participate successfully in higher education to young people and adults from groups or backgrounds where this is not traditionally a considered option.

The University underpins its work in this area with a commitment to high quality learning and teaching and to the provision of strong support services to include, retain and develop successful learners who may have diverse entry profiles.

The University operates a broad-based bursary scheme in order to encourage applications from students of limited means. The University of Chester has major campuses in Chester and Warrington which draw on a wide range of socio-economic groups. 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.

2. Full-time tuition fees

The University of Chester charges fees up to a limit of £3,290 per student on all full-time undergraduate courses for which it is responsible. This includes all eligible programmes of study delivered in partner colleges of the University of Chester. Fees, bursaries and income threshold levels will normally be uplifted each year in line with inflation increases announced by the Government.

Foundation Degrees

For Foundation Degree students, the tuition fee of £3,290 per annum will normally be offset for full-time self-financing learners by a bursary of £1,980 (pro-rata for part time) which will be applied as a fee waiver. Tuition fees payable will therefore normally be £1,310 per year for full-time self-financing learners (pro rata for part-time), but may vary in certain cases.

3. Amounts of additional fee income to be spent on access measures

The University intends to spend an estimated 17% of the revenue that accrues from additional fee income on bursaries designed to widen participation and support students from low level income groups or backgrounds under-represented higher education. This is in addition to established Scholarships awarded by the University.

The University provides a wide range of activities, services and support related to widening access, both in collaboration with Aimhigher and independently from its own HEFCE grant and additional tuition fee income. The University also uses a proportion of this income to resource at subject and department level further outreach

activities aimed at groups of potential students with backgrounds traditionally less likely to consider higher education as an option.

4. University of Chester Bursaries

Maintenance Bursaries

Undergraduates

For all the students in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG), the University supplements the maintenance grant received by the bursary entitlement of £329.

Over and above this commitment to these students, the University wishes to continue to attract students with lower levels of income and who are already under-represented in higher education nationally. It therefore operates a further maintenance bursary scheme, targeted at those with most need.

Students are assessed on the basis of income and receive the following bursary if they are entitled to the full HEMG.

HE Maintenance Grant Entitlement	University of Chester Bursary	Income Level
£2,906	£1,000 (includes mandatory £329)	Less than £25,000

Bursary allocations will be determined using Student Loans Company data. All full-time UK students liable to pay the full tuition fee of £3,290, who are studying on courses funded by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills and who are in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant, will be eligible for the maintenance bursary scheme.

All maintenance bursaries will be paid as bursary grants and not as fee waivers. Half of the University of Chester bursary (£500) is paid in cash and half by card credit to eligible students, redeemable against purchase of books, computers and other products on sale in the bookshop on the Chester campus.

Payments are normally made as follows:

October	Book credit	£350
January	Book credit	£150
February	Cash	£200
May	Cash	£300

(Payment dates may be subject to change.)

PGCE

The University of Chester commits itself to supplementing the maintenance grant of £2,906 received by students from lowest level income groups by a sum of £329, paid in cash in December.

5. Provision of information to students

The University of Chester's Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions 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. The University of Chester therefore ensures that students are able to access up to date information about the University's arrangements for fees and bursaries through its website. Information on fees and funding, including full information on bursary eligibility, is sent to all applicants who receive offers together with the letter offering them a place. The section on Finance in the University of Chester Student Guide, containing information for new students, emphasises the importance of giving consent to share financial details when applying for a student loan. 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 is pro-active in targeting information to those groups through a number of channels. It provides specific written guidance on costs at all recruitment events at which it is represented and uses 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. The University is the lead institution in the Cheshire and Warrington Employer Engagement Lifelong Learning Network and also the lead higher education institution in the Aimhigher Cheshire and Warrington area partnership. These activities, aimed at widening participation, 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.

6. Outreach work

The University believes that its bursary package, in conjunction with its current and planned outreach activities, represents a robust system for ensuring that educational opportunities are made widely available. The University continues to provide an extensive range of outreach work which should be seen in the context of a well-resourced marketing, recruitment and widening participation operation. It therefore does not at this stage devote a specific proportion of additional fee income, other than the bursary scheme, to those outreach activities. The University's Director of Widening Access oversees the University's involvement in the area Aimhigher and other outreach activities, such as the HEFCE funded Summer Schools, for young people who might otherwise gain no experience of a higher education environment. In addition, the University operates a number of very successful mentoring projects to support young people from low participation backgrounds in raising their aspirations and levels of achievement.

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. For intensive activities and sustained interventions, the University aims to target individuals from

the lower socio-economic groups and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, the University aims further to continue its outreach work in targeting further education colleges in low participation areas. Existing links and agreements with further education colleges have already contributed 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 has responded positively to requests from a number of its key partner FE colleges to move to Associate College status, a central purpose of which is 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 much of its spending on widening participation from additional fee income to the bursary scheme.

7. Part-time tuition fees

Part-time fees vary, but for self-financing students are normally pro rata to the full-time fee.

The University does not as part of its access agreement provide bursaries for part-time students (other than the tuition fee bursary available to self-financing part-time FD students). However, the University is extending 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.

8. 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. Warrington Collegiate, West Cheshire and Reaseheath FE Colleges are now Associate Colleges.

The University of Chester currently has formal and informal Progression Agreements with a number of FE colleges, sixth form colleges and schools. It aims to both maintain and consolidate its current level of engagement and furthermore to extend its Progression Agreements to schools and colleges beyond its local area. The University has set itself the target of increasing the number of its revised Progression Agreements with schools and colleges, targeting primarily those in low participation neighbourhoods

In particular, the University aims to continue to improve 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 by 2011. Performance indicators based on HESA statistics will be used. The University's PIs for the years 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/7 and 2007/08, as published by HESA, are shown below:

		Chester 04/05	Benchmark 04/05	Chester 05/06	Benchmark 05/06
Young first degree entrants	Social class	34.7%	32.2%	34.4	32.7
	Low participation neighbourhood	19.3%	15.8%	19.3	15.7
Young full-time undergraduate entrants	Social class	35.0%	32.5%	34.2	33.1
	Low participation neighbourhood	19.3%	16.6%	20.1	16.4
Mature entrants (all UG)	Low participation neighbourhood + no previous HE qualification	22.03 %	20.5%	25.0	20.6

		Chester 06/07	Benchmark 06/07	Chester 07/08	Benchmark 07/08
Young full-time first degree entrants	From state schools or colleges	96.6	92.2	96.8	92.2
	From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7	36.4	34.1	36.1	34.1
	From low participation neighbourhoods	12.9	10.7	15.4	11.2
Young full-time undergraduate entrants –all	From state schools or colleges	96.7	92.4	96.7	92.5
	From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7	36.7	34.4	36.0	34.6
	From low participation neighbourhoods	13.7	11.2	16.6	12.0
Mature full-time first degree entrants	With no previous HE & from low participation neighbourhood	16.0	12.3	19.6	13.5
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants –all	With no previous HE & from low participation neighbourhood	17.9	14.3	19.8	13.9

Based on POLAR 2 data for low participation neighbourhoods

The low participation indicators for the University are generally significantly better than HESA national, and locally-adjusted, benchmarks. 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 widening participation and diversity and equality strategies, it will therefore continue to seek to identify particular measures aimed at increasing the number of suitably qualified applicants from ethnic minority groups.

The University will continue to extend partnership and network relationships in order to enhance access and progression opportunities for those with employment-related qualifications and experience. In particular, the development of Foundation Degrees stimulated by the Lifelong Learning Network, is providing an increase in vocational progression opportunities to those who might not otherwise consider participation in higher education. Progression Agreements are also designed to stimulate progression opportunities for vocational learners who might not otherwise have traditionally considered higher education as an option.

A full summary of the University's institutional targets and milestones for widening participation are given within its Widening Participation Strategic Assessment 2009-12.

9. Institutional Monitoring Arrangements

Progress against the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment targets and milestones will be monitored by reports to the University's Executive Group, and by making use of the annual return to HEFCE and public HESA data.

To assist in this the University has developed its data analysis and monitoring of application and recruitment patterns from under-represented groups, including in particular the distribution of those from lower income groups. UCAS information on socio-economic class of applicants has been used. The University has also developed its use of HEFCE Polar and funding data on participation from low-participation neighbourhoods and groups.

The University has developed 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. The University of Chester also undertakes detailed analysis of retention data at department, subject and programme level, and uses this within the business planning and faculty annual review processes.

Data on the eligibility of students for bursary awards based on household income provide an internal benchmark against which progress with take up, and expenditure, will continue to be monitored.

Updated August 2009