

## **UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE**

### **ACCESS AGREEMENT**

#### **1 Overview**

The University of Hertfordshire has a strong track record of success in raising aspirations and thus in widening participation. This is amply demonstrated by our performance in recruiting students from under-represented groups, and consistency in meeting the relevant HEFCE performance indicators. In a broader sense, the University is committed to contributing to the raising of participation rates at national level.

When variable fees were introduced in 2006 there was considerable concern that they would prove to be a serious barrier to participation amongst the least well off, in spite of the introduction of maintenance grants and student loans. Therefore the University provided bursaries linked to the means tested element of each student's final LA/SLC/DIUS grant assessment. However, analysis of student recruitment and surveys of student opinion carried out by the University and nationally indicate that student loans and maintenance grants have been very effective in supporting less well off students. It is therefore believed that, while maintaining bursaries for the least well off, resources should be redirected to enhancing outreach activities and the support of students after they have enrolled.

To ensure that all students have clear and accessible information about the changes to student funding, the University will invest significantly in a programme of information dissemination.

This access agreement covers all relevant University provision delivered on-campus or in our UK partner institutions.

#### **2 Fee limits**

For 2009/10, the University proposes to charge £3,225 per annum for all its full-time eligible undergraduate provision. For subsequent years, this figure will be amended in accordance with DIUS regulations for index-linking.

#### **3 Bursaries and other financial support for students**

##### **3.1 Bursaries**

A bursary is a payment made to a student, the level of which is income dependent.

For students with a household income of £25,000 or less, in receipt of a full state grant, the University will provide a bursary of £1,000 in 2008/9.

In subsequent years the bursary level will be index-linked in accordance with DIUS regulations.

Bursaries will be payable in two equal instalments for each academic year:

(i) 31 January

(ii) 30 April

To be eligible, students must be in attendance at the University up to and including these dates.

This bursary will be available to students studying on courses funded through HEFCE or non PGCE students funded via the TDA. PGCE students in receipt of full state support will receive the minimum bursary.

Students studying on health related courses not funded by HEFCE are not eligible for this bursary.

Students on social work programmes in receipt of a DoH bursary are also not eligible for this bursary.

As a consequence of our successful widening participation activities, a significant proportion of our student population is expected to qualify for a bursary payment and we aim to maintain this student profile.

The University acknowledges that additional support may be needed by 'Care Leavers'. The institution reviewed its support arrangements during 2006/7 and as a consequence has entered into an agreement with Hertfordshire County Council to introduce, on a pilot basis, a scheme to provide specific support to care leavers in Hertfordshire.

### 3.2 Scholarships

Scholarships are sums of money made available to students achieving high academic standards in specific areas. They may be subject-specific or donated by a benefactor for a particular programme of study. A student may be in receipt of a bursary and a scholarship: the two are not mutually exclusive.

A number of scholarships will be made available for specific subject areas within the University. We have also developed scholarships for students on foundation degrees and extended degrees offered through our partner colleges. For up-to-date information on the scholarships scheme, please refer to the University's website: [www.herts.ac.uk](http://www.herts.ac.uk).

## **4 Provision of Information to Students.**

The University recognises the importance of providing clear and transparent information on the financial arrangements for students. It will communicate information on fees, bursaries and scholarships to applicants and potential applicants in several different ways:

- The UH web site will include student finance web pages explaining the University's policy on tuition fees and availability and eligibility of bursaries. Where appropriate the web pages will be linked to relevant external web sites.
- The University's undergraduate prospectus will contain information explaining its policy on tuition fees, bursaries and scholarships.
- A separate leaflet will be available at higher education fairs or in response to enquiries.
- All University Open Days will have designated presentations and question/answer sessions on student finance.

- A facility for applicants to see Student Finance staff on an individual basis will be available.
- Education / Schools liaison activities – the University will continue to provide support in terms of workshops and briefings to schools, colleges and careers offices throughout the region.

Information provided will include factual details and case studies.

## **5 Outreach work**

At present, the University spends in excess of £1.2 million on outreach activities. As a result of the University's widening participation strategy, the number of students recruited from our target groups – mature students, students from low participation neighbourhoods and students from social classes IIIIM, IV, V – has met or exceeded our benchmarks. However, a significant reduction in Aimhigher funding will result in a reduction of outreach work unless funding is made available for other sources. In keeping with the new Aimhigher agenda, this outreach work will also be targeted to areas of serious under-participation and to those students who will benefit most from such activities. In that respect, the University's close links with the 14-19 Strategic Area Partnership Groups in Hertfordshire will be particularly valuable. It is also intended to expand the University's involvement in programmes for Gifted & Talented students. It is anticipated that a further £100,000 will be spent on outreach in 2009/10.

The University's partnership with our local FE Colleges, to form the Hertfordshire HE Consortium, is a core element of our widening participation work. Fundamental to our widening participation strategy is the concept of partnership working – we engage with key stakeholders in the region who have an interface with the under-represented groups that we seek to attract into HE. In doing so, we can exploit the natural relationships which already exist and use them as a lever to raise aspirations. However, within the partnership framework, we also engage directly with pupils to provide them with experience of the University environment, to make HE more accessible and to dispel negative preconceptions, particularly in areas where there is a tradition of low participation in HE. Embedding of the progression work previously carried out by the Lifelong Learning Network will require an extra expenditure of £50,000 in 2009-10.

The provision of accessible, timely and co-ordinated information about all aspects of HE is vital to our success and we have a raft of communication activities aimed at young people, their parents/carers and teachers.

The University is a key player in the Aimhigher programme for Hertfordshire, in partnership with Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council, LEA, Schools and Colleges.

The University has an established programme of support for schools and colleges designed to reach out to groups who might otherwise have been excluded from a University career. Specifically, this includes:

- a) Regular briefings for school/college staff to ensure an understanding of current HE developments (examples include student finance, the UCAS tariff, value of key skills, writing references).

- b) Liaison with four Consortium Colleges to foster links and support for students' progression to higher education from further education.
- c) Development of the 'Unibridge' course, which provides additional skills support for those who need it prior to their HE studies. This is jointly delivered by the University and its partner Colleges.
- d) Wide-ranging support for careers activities in schools and colleges.
- e) Liaison in respect of over thirty compact agreements (many in 'cold spots') and setting up associated events through the year.
- f) Vocational and Further Education Routes to Higher Education, based in the Further Education colleges, including work-based learning opportunities.
- g) A range of talks for years 10 to 13 regarding University. These include 'Getting into University'-usually year 11 or 12, 'Admission Tutors View' about personal statements, "Finance" – year 12 or 13, 'The Student Experience'– year 11 or 12, 'Surviving with a child at University'" – aimed at parents.
- h) 'Aimhigher' days for year 9 pupils where they work with students on the University campus to explore aspects of going to University.
- i) Routine deployment of 'Student Ambassadors' to talk to pupils at schools with low participation rates.
- j) School visits to the University by year 9, 10, 11 and 12.
- k) Supporting and implementing 14 – 19 pathfinder initiatives and events, for example three schools recently attended a 'Work Related Learning' day – 400 pupils and staff on the University's campus.
- l) Summer schools, e.g. 'Artscool' – particularly targeted at under-represented groups.
- m) University of Hertfordshire students acting as mentors for local primary school pupils – this is targeted at schools which have low rates of progression to higher education. The mentoring programme covers year 6 to 13. The University also runs a well-developed 'Hatfield Ahead' mentoring programme, supporting Year 6 pupils with their transition to secondary school.

## 6 Milestones

HEFCE has well established performance indicators for widening participation. To date, the University has been very successful in exceeding or coming close to the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmarks for widening participation. This is demonstrated by the most recently published figures (2006/07) which are reproduced below:

Participation of under-represented group in HE

Young full-time undergraduate entrants:

from state schools or colleges : from group 97.9%, location adjusted benchmark 93.5%

from social classes 4, 5, 6 & 7 : from group 39.9%, location adjusted benchmark 35.8%

from low participation neighbourhoods from group 8.1%, location adjusted benchmark 8.9%

In terms of milestones, the University will aim to continue to meet the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmark performance indicators set out above.

## **8 Monitoring arrangements**

An annual report on performance in widening participation will be submitted to the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Director of Finance. The report will set out the University's performance against the HEFCE location adjusted benchmarks, will review the impact of variable fees and bursaries, and will evaluate the University's performance in the activities listed in sections 4, 5 and 6 above. The Group will agree actions to be taken including changes to the activities.

The Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Group will report to the Board of Governors and to the Vice Chancellors Group (VCG). VCG is an executive group of the University chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and comprising Deans of Faculty and Directors of the Support Services. The final report will be submitted to OFFA through HEFCE's Annual Monitoring Statement for Higher Education Institutions.