

ACCESS AGREEMENT

between

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

and

THE OFFICE FOR FAIR ACCESS

2012-13

1 The University's Mission and Context

Access, progression, student achievement and employment are all central to the University's *raison d'être* and have been for well over a century and a half – ever since the institution's inception in 1848. A teaching-led University with a strong emphasis on applied research, the University today is seeking to build further on its proud record in widening participation and on its traditional strengths in vocational, professional and liberal education. Indeed we aspire, as articulated in our new strategic plan, to be an agency of regeneration in the Capital, a "University of opportunity" that will endeavour to meet the needs of all our stakeholders by "transforming lives, meeting society's needs and building rewarding careers".

This aspiration bears testament to the University's enduring commitment to social responsibility and social justice as well as the success of the University in fulfilling its original historic purpose. For today, in whichever way access is measured, London Metropolitan University is one of the most socially inclusive Universities in the UK.

Examination of our student profile for 2009-10, for example, reveals that over half of the University's 29,000 students are from minority ethnic communities, compared with 15% of students nationally. Of the full-time undergraduate entrants, 54% were mature compared with 22% nationally, 96% were from state schools or colleges (88% nationally) and 45% were from socio-economic groups 4, 5, 6, and 7 (30% nationally).

More than that, these London Met proportions of full-time undergraduate entrants are not only substantially higher than the national averages they are also better than the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmark figures too: 96% compared with 94% for state school entrants; 45% compared with 38% for socio-economic groups 4, 5, 6, and 7; and 9% compared with 7% for low participation neighbourhoods. We are tremendously proud of this achievement and intend both to safeguard and to build on it in the future.

2 **Fee Limits and Fee Income above £6,000**

Like other Universities, London Metropolitan University, too, has had to consider how best to “square the circle” of meeting the needs of our students and fulfilling, on the one hand our institutional obligations and aspirations with, on the other, preparing for a new market in which the student (rather than the Funding Council) will, in effect, be the main agent of funding in 2012-13.

As such, we undertook a fundamental review over the last year of how, when, where and what we should offer, including consultation with students, and have decided to consolidate our portfolio around c. 160 courses (listed in the attached annex).

Our new model is grounded in ensuring student value for money as well as affordability – as tested through our students, and we have therefore elected to levy tuition fees at several price points across the range of £4,500 to £9,000.

The average undergraduate course fee will be approximately £6,850.

We would also like to confirm that it is our intention to apply new annual increases in tuition fees in line with the amount set by the government each year.

3 **Expenditure on additional access and retention measures**

The likely demand for HE under the new funding arrangements which come into effect in 2012-13 is, of course, as yet unclear, and likely to remain so in the short-term.

We would anticipate though – in the event that the level of student demand is similar to that hitherto and our responding effectively to emerging market conditions – investing approximately 15% of the fees we are charging above £6,000 in line with OFFA’s expectations.

The balance of this investment will be in retention rather than outreach activity.

4. **Access Record**

Our track record in fair access and widening participation, as we’ve noted, is an exceptionally strong one exemplified in:

- The diversity of our student profile;
- Our historic and enduring commitment to the University’s mission (and)
- Our achievement in out-performing both National Performance Indicators and HEFCE benchmarks

We have been less successful however in facilitating student progression, achievement and completion. We fully recognise this issue and are committed to improving our performance in this regard.

5. **Access and Outreach Activity (Pre-entry Support)**

The nature and volume of our outreach activity is both extensive and intensive across all Faculties of the University supported by a dedicated professional services team. It has also proved to be highly effective.

Our outreach work aims to:

- inspire young people and members of the local community about the possibilities offered by higher education
- support local learners enabling them to achieve the skills necessary for success in higher education
- develop progression pathways and curriculum support projects in a number of vocational areas to improve the accessibility of higher education to local learners

And our particular target groups are:

- those whose cultural and social circumstances make them less likely to consider residential higher education provision away from their home, or indeed to consider higher education at all
- those aged 18 who have underachieved because of social circumstances and have the potential to benefit from higher education
- socially excluded and at risk groups including those with prior health problems which may have been a barrier to progression, newly established minority ethnic groups, estate communities, lone parents, et al.
- gifted and talented students from local schools in neighbourhoods where participation in higher education is low.

We pursue our outreach work through a range of collaborative partnerships and well-established activities with local schools and colleges and other community organisations; specialist outreach bodies and preparation for study programmes. We aim to maintain and develop this activity still further.

Access HE: A new pan-London collaboration

We also intend to secure the legacy of our work achieved through Aimhigher by adding a collaborative pan-London dimension to our own access and outreach plans. This will further help students (and their teachers) to have contact with a wider range of higher education opportunities.

Through our established regional membership association London Higher, we are in discussion with the developers of AccessHE. This is a new social enterprise formed by, and for, London's HE sector. It will seek to take forward some selected aspects of the collaborative and targeted programmes of the current Aimhigher partnerships in London, following a lead by WECAN (the Partnership in West, Central and North London), whilst at the same time, and in a cost-effective, co-ordinated way, exploring possible new ways of reaching out to schools across the capital and including especially young people under-represented in HE.

This new pan-London collaborative approach will help support and inform our Access Agreement by, for example, the acquisition, analysis and reporting of data, such as contextual data, school and college profiles, patterns of access by different groups across London and deprivation profiles. Taken together, these are important aids to targeting, and to delivery at the local level. Monitoring, evaluation and also co-ordination on the pan-London basis will help us to place our own efforts into the necessary broader context of widening participation, and help to show if recent valuable momentum is being maintained.

Through our joint efforts, we are expecting to confirm the constitution, budget and work programme of this new collaborative group during the first half of the 2011-12 academic year. On behalf of the participating group of London HE institutions, London Higher will liaise closely with OFFA to explain how its activities address directly the requirements of OFFA's March 2011 guidance, and the spirit of the letter of Sir Alan Langlands to heads of institutions dated 11 March, 2011. If, having taken part in the initial set up discussions and process, this institution should decide after all not to take part in the new London Higher/AccessHE collaboration, you will of course be advised.

We envisage that once established the group will report annually to all participating HEIs to show what benefits the collaboration has brought, and how it has helped individual HEIs, such as ourselves, to engage more effectively with identified schools and colleges for outreach purposes.

6. Student Retention (Post-entry Support)

We have sought to improve student progression and achievement in a variety of ways that were commended by the QAA in their Institutional Audit (April, 2011) of the University:

- Making the offer of admission to students on the basis of likelihood of “completion” and not simply that of “benefit”.
- The deployment of personal academic advisers and their regular use of diagnostic data to identify and support undergraduate students at academic risk
- The practical and scholarly support provided in the Assessment Framework and the taught provision manuals.

We will also be seeking to make further improvements in student progression as a consequence of the review of undergraduate education we undertook over the last year in which we have identified the need and committed ourselves to:

- A new curriculum credit architecture in 2012-13 in which students will study (“long-thin”) year-long modules (rather than semester ones) offering greater opportunity for student development and guidance.
- 30 weeks of formal scheduled teaching (six weeks greater than the current average)
- 12 hours a week of formal scheduled teaching for first-year undergraduates
- Establishing genuinely introductory courses in Year 1; one which takes account of the students’ prior educational (and work) experience and offers them an “intellectual map” on which to build.

- Placing student engagement, student employability and professional practice at the heart of our curriculum.

We also recognise that we need to go further in this regard.

We aim to participate in the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) and intend to match the allocation that we have been awarded: viz. a further £561K (or 187 £3K scholarships) making a total of £1,122K (or 374 £3K scholarships).

We do not, however, intend to make any further additional (Non-NSP) financial provision. We have little evidence that financial bursaries have had a discernible impact on student admission or student retention. Rather we have sought to combine value for money with affordability in our fee offer with no hidden extra costs or charges for students.

We also intend to follow through on our strategic commitments to:

- Address the needs of students in a more effective (“joined up”) way over the whole of the student “life cycle” through our:
 - Sorting strategies; dealing with students pre-entry
 - Connecting strategies: helping students integrate with one another at London Met
 - Supporting strategies; supporting students inside and outside London Met
 - Transforming (student) strategies; helping students become confident and capable independent learners
 - Transforming (staff) strategies; supporting staff in this process
- Be better self-informed by researching the actual rather than assumed student experience
- Integrate our Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions to oversee that part of the student life-cycle, from initial inquiry through to enrolment, as a means of ensuring prospective students make an informed choice
- Build on existing internal good practice and ensure a high quality induction experience for all students
- Engage all staff in “retention thinking”
- Harness the collective power of professional services departments and faculties
- Establish a positive learning environment based on professional informality

7. **Targets and Milestones**

We plan to develop and take forward our outreach work around four main priorities:

- Developing and extending our external partnerships with community partners still further
- Collaborating with partners to organize events and activities which inspire local people to progress to higher education

- Developing a broader range of local vocational progression pathways and curriculum enrichment projects which support student progression and success
- Sharing good practice in access and widening participation throughout the whole of the University.

Our key performance indicators will remain the location-adjusted benchmarks set by the HEFCE. And our target in the future will be to ensure that, at the very minimum, we at least meet these benchmarks and preferably, as we currently do now, exceed them.

In the case of student retention our target is:

- To achieve a year-on-year improvement in the percentage of all learners successfully completing the programme of learning on which they are registered (and to achieve comparable success by students from diverse educational backgrounds) in line with National PIs and HEFCE benchmarks.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

We will monitor and evaluate our performance in a variety of ways:

- Through the University's Widening Participation Strategic Framework
- Through the regular review of institutional KPIs by the University's Executive and reported to the Board of Governors
- Through the University's annual monitoring exercise; an activity that embraces all programmes in the University and all members of the Senior Management group and is overseen by Academic Board.
- As part of the University's risk management process; the outcomes of which is reported directly to the University's Executive team and the Board of Governors.
- Through the internal processes accompanying the annual monitoring return to HEFCE at the end of each academic year.

9. Provision of Information to Prospective Students

We confirm that we are committed to making the information on courses, tuition fees and financial support set out in this Access Agreement and appendices readily available to prospective students, UCAS and the SLC in a timely and appropriate fashion.

For students this information will appear in the printed prospectuses, the University's website and key information sets as they are developed. Training will be provided for all student advisers and for recruitment and admissions staff to ensure that the correct information is given to all students including direct applicants, whether in writing, by telephone, or in person at Open Days, consistent with our proposed Student Charter and our aim that students make as informed a choice as possible.

