

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education Access Agreement for 2012/13

1. Context

1.1 Background

With over 10,000 students, South Essex College of Further and Higher Education is one of the largest providers in the Eastern Region for Further and Higher Education programmes as well as services to business and bespoke employer responsive provision.

The College was formed on 1st January 2010 following the merger of South East Essex College and Thurrock & Basildon College. The excellent records for widening participation of these two institutions have been further enhanced by the merger which has enabled increased opportunities for Higher Education study across the South Essex region.

The College works in partnership with the University of Essex and the University of East London, and has approximately 960 FTE's with the University of Essex and 45 FTE's with the University of East London, both indirectly funded. This Access Agreement outlines the position related to an additional 200 directly funded FTE's that are being bid for through the 'flexible margin'. The College has made commitments through the Annex B of the University of Essex's Access Agreement for indirectly funded new year one applicants who will pay £7,000 in 2012. This agreement matches the Colleges financial commitment for the directly funded FTE's described in this document. University of East London Higher Education learners are registered directly and their Access Agreement covers all FTE's indirectly funded and outlines the commitments UEL have made to those learners.

The College is highly effective at meeting the needs of the region for flexible, local study opportunities for candidates with little or no previous experience of HE. In 2009-10, 28.3% of full-time first degree entrants were from low participation neighbourhoods, 49.5% were from NS-SEC 4,5,6 and 7, and 100% were from state schools. In addition the College provides high levels of learning support. 13% disclose a learning difficulty and or disability and this equates to 145 learners overall. Of these learners all are initially assessed and assisted in applying for a Disabled Student Allowance via Student Finance England where appropriate.

This Access Agreement is intended to build on our strengths and experience, as well as focus on the specific needs of our students. It has been informed by careful evaluation of a range of existing interventions and current best practice, as well as research carried out with students and advisers in local Schools and Colleges. We have engaged the College's Student Council in developing this Access Agreement and work closely with them on many of the proposed interventions.

1.2 Aims of the College Access Agreement

The College Access Agreement aims to:

- Maintain the College's strengths in access for students from groups under represented in higher education.
- Raise aspirations among potential applicants from under represented groups.
- Improve retention of students on higher education programmes from under represented groups.
- Use a learner journey centred approach through outreach initiatives to increase the awareness and attitudes towards higher education of students enabling them to make informed decisions about their future.
- Increase applications and acceptances to higher education from targeted groups, particularly lower-socio economic groups.

2. Tuition Fee

For undergraduate Home and European Union students entering in 2012 onto the first year of undergraduate programmes delivered by the College and awarded by the University of Essex, the College proposes to charge a tuition fee of £7000. The estimated number of students in addition to those indicated in the Annex B of the University of Essex's Access Agreement, who will be paying the fee of £7000 is 200. This fee will be subject to annual increases in line with the amount set by the Government. The tuition fee for students entering in 2013 onwards will be under review and confirmed in the 2013-14 Access Agreement.

Continuing students, new entrants and transferring students to years two and three of a programme will be subject to the South Essex College annex of the University of Essex Access Agreement for 2011 entry. This is estimated to affect approximately 700 students.

3. Expenditure

In 2012-13, the College will allocate 45.5% of its additional fee income, as defined by OFFA, on additional activities related to raising aspirations and progression to Higher Education by under represented groups, improving retention, contributing to the National Scholarship Programme and providing bursaries.

The College expects to allocate £40,000 in 2012-13 to fund activities that will support raising aspirations and progression to HE and improve retention.

This expenditure is in addition to the 25.6% of additional fee income the College is spending as part of the University of Essex Access Agreement.

3.1 Activities to raise aspirations and promote progression to HE

These activities will build on those previously funded by Aimhigher for students attending further education programmes at the College and on 14-18 programmes at local schools. In 2010-11 we reached 4000 potential applicants from local Schools, Sixth Form Colleges and Further Education Colleges. We intend to increase this outreach activity to include additional Schools, Adult Community Colleges, Local Authorities and Community Groups across the wider South Essex region, to reach 5000 individuals by 2016-17.

We will specifically target Schools using the following criteria

- any school with more than 50 per cent of its students from the 40 per cent most deprived Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), super output areas (SOAs) or with very large cohorts and more than 25 per cent of students from the 40 per cent most deprived IDACI SOAs;
- any school with more than 25 per cent of its students from 40 per cent of the most deprived SOAs and more than 50 per cent of the students from educationally deprived SOAs;
- additional information obtained from consultations with local authorities about local schools.

Typical outreach activities will include:

- School visits to and HE experience days at the College
- Information, advice and guidance in local schools
- Information, advice and guidance events for parents and carers on HE progression
- Taster sessions on HE programmes
- Mobile HE road show to visit schools and Colleges across the region
- Subject based Research Conferences for local schools and colleges

3.2 Activities to improve retention of HE students

These activities will raise aspirations for achievement, promote awareness of the world of work and the skills needed in employment and improve retention.

Typical activities will include:

- A peer mentorship scheme in which a final year HE student from each programme will be appointed to offer on course support to those on lower years. This student mentor will create a linkage between students on differing years of the programme and will offer advice and guidance about progression as well as encouraging a programme identity through the management of social activities.
- Development of a HE study skills area in the HE Centre to enable drop in support for learners offered by the College's learner services team. This support will target year one learners on all programmes to develop academic/ functional/ key skills, year two learners in the further development of research techniques and year three learners, preparation for employment.
- A College Higher Education Newsletter including sections on alumni of the College, raising the aspirations of current HE students.

3.3 Financial support for students

National Scholarship Programme

Participation in the NSP will target students identified as having the greatest financial need and will focus on enabling these students to access the College and benefit from the student experience. Annex B of the University of Essex Access Agreement outlines the College's commitment to the NSP for 2012-13. In this year, the College will contribute £45,000 to the NSP, providing 30 first year UK students with a fee waiver of £3,000. The students will be from low income households with a household income of up to £10,000. As well as meeting eligibility criteria students will be required to meet UCAS, NSP and College enrolment deadlines.

In 2013-14 the College will contribute, subject to the approval of directly funded numbers, £54,000 to the National Scholarship Programme. This will provide 36 first year UK students with a fee waiver of £3,000. These students will meet the NSP eligibility criteria and will be from low income households with a household income of up to £10,000. As well as meeting eligibility criteria students will be required to meet UCAS, NSP and College enrolment deadlines.

College Progression Bursaries

Any student on a further education programme at the College who registers for a degree programme at the College within one year of completion of the FE programme will receive a non means tested bursary of £300 for their first year of entry. The College expects to allocate £51,000 per year for these bursaries.

Continuing Students

Continuing students who started their course prior to 2012 will follow the bursary scheme that was offered at the point of entry, subject to any inflationary increases.

Finance information

The College already provides information on student finance support in all pre-application material including the prospectus and in the student finance area of the College website. Finance information is distributed at pre-applicant events, including higher education fairs, open events, careers evenings and school/college presentations. Outreach staff deliver higher education finance presentations in a large number of schools and Colleges throughout the year, to parents and carers at the College and visit and interview days

However, we recognise that the changes to 2012 undergraduate fees have led to considerable confusion. For 2012 targeted information on student finance has been developed including printed publicity material to support IAG in schools, for FE learners at the College and for use at careers and education events. In addition the College website offers a portal for IAG on changes to fees and the application process.

4. Targets and Milestones

The College will make use of data provided by our partners and internally to monitor performance. The University of Essex has made a commitment in their Access Agreement to disaggregate the University and partner institutions HESA data, enabling the College to evaluate data against HESA Performance Indicators (PIs) to monitor performance in access and widening participation.

The College will also be developing internal mechanisms to manage targets, monitor progress through institutional data, develop systems to track students from outreach/enquiry stage through to graduate employability and disaggregate. More immediate data will be used to inform and measure retention and employability activity.

We will use additional data where available, particularly via UCAS. While we currently intend to make use of contextual data for admission purposes at the point of confirmation, this information will also be used for data and monitoring purposes.

In addition to the shared targets in the University of Essex Access Agreement the following outlines our expected levels of performance over the next 3 years.

Baseline	Target				
Measure	Current	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Outreach activity					
Increase the percentage of eligible South Essex College FE level 3 completers who progress to our Higher Education courses	16%	18%	19%	20%	21%
Sustain and develop our outreach activity by engaging with a growing number of students from local schools and Colleges	4000	4200	4400	4600	4800
Maintain the proportion of HE students who are disabled at 10% or greater	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Activities to improve success and progression					
Improve Higher Level Grades (1 st and 2:1)	51%	52%	53%	54%	55%
Improve year one success* rates	78%	80%	81%	82%	83%
Increase % progression to graduate jobs within 6 months of graduation	54%	55%	56%	57%	58%

*Success is the number of registered starts divided by the number of students achieving credits to pass the stage/year.

Institutional Monitoring Arrangements

The College's Heads of Higher Education (Curriculum & Quality) will undertake regular monitoring of information provided by University partners and the College's registry department including applications, intake, retention and employability. They will assess impact, access and progress against targets and report termly to the College's Senior Leadership Team.

The reports will be scheduled to align to the College's annual quality cycle and will allow sufficient time for any reasonable adjustments to ensure compliance with this agreement.

College faculties and academies review progression rates as part of the Annual Monitoring process which are reported to partners and performance against targets for access, retention and employability are built into the Colleges Key Performance Indicators which are monitored and reported at FE Corporation.

