



OFFICE FOR FAIR ACCESS: ACCESS AGREEMENT

2011/12

1. Background and Context

Edge Hill University has a long and successful history of commitment to widening participation with a strong track record in the recruitment of students from under-represented groups and in the provision of high quality teaching, learning and student support services that sustain good rates of progression and achievement. We lead the region in Aimhigher and consistently perform at or above our HEFCE benchmark for participation, diversity and efficiency.

The decision to implement variable tuition fees has been taken with a view to providing a range of financial support schemes targeted to students where the level of family income could be a disincentive to participation in higher education, offering direct support to student learning and to securing further investment in the infrastructure that supports these areas. We expect 50 – 60% of our students to benefit through these schemes as detailed in later sections. Our Bursaries and Scholarships Scheme was awarded the 'Outstanding Student Support Financial Package' in the Times Higher Awards 2006.

In addition, we wish to extend our provision of outreach activities and develop progression opportunities through our partnership arrangements to further widen our student base. Our on-course package, which emphasises life-cycle support, is designed to enhance our ability to attract students from groups that have not previously considered higher education as a viable option whilst the recognition of excellence in areas especially pertinent to our mission and long-term development aims adds an important extra dimension.

This Access Agreement has been developed in the light of our most recent Corporate Planning Statement and its perceived strengths demonstrating our existing commitment to the widening participation agenda:

1. We are one of the top ten Universities in the country for the recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods and social class Low NS-SEC 4-7. We outperform our benchmark significantly on all the social inclusion indicators.
2. We are committed to the continuous enhancement of and investment in the student experience.
3. We have made significant year on year investment (£85m over 10 years) to achieve one of the best campuses in the NW.

4. The quality of our support to students has been endorsed by students through the National Student Survey, internal Student Satisfaction Surveys and by external agencies (QAA, OFSTED, NMC) through quality review processes.
5. Two thirds of all reviews by the Quality Assurance Agency have achieved excellent ratings (22/24) and since 2003 all subjects have received commendations for Learning and Teaching.
6. Our financial performance is strong and has been confirmed by internal and external auditors and the HEFCE Audit Service.
7. Our market position has strengthened year on year. We have seen growth of more than 70% in UCAS applications since 2001 with a 38% increase for 2007 entry against a national rise of 5.4%.
8. We have developed substantial and wide ranging outreach and access programmes funded through a variety of sources.
9. Fair access has been at the heart of our Admissions Policy for many years and Edge Hill supports the broad principles outlined in the Schwartz Review of Admissions.
10. We are an initial partner with the Frank Buttle Trust, working to raise aspiration amongst Care Leavers.
11. We are committed to Foundation Degrees and have the largest programme in the country for Teaching Assistants and a number of programmes with further education collaborative partners.
12. We are the lead institution for the Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN offering students a passport scheme for HE progression within the LLN and we work in partnership with a wide range of FE providers to deliver relevant local HE provision.
13. The University is a member of the bid team to develop a Lancashire LLN.
14. We have recently opened a Research Centre for Widening Participation to investigate, identify and disseminate best practice in this area.
15. We are committed to the continued development of Access programmes (Fastrack and FastForward) providing entry routes to all our undergraduate provision including teaching and health programmes and offering bridging opportunities for those in employment to Foundation Degrees.
16. Our commitment to Summer School provision is nationally recognised. Edge Hill was the only HEI to be awarded funding to run a national ITT Summer School.

17. The University is the regional lead institution for Aimhigher North West and also delivers a wide ranging aspiration-raising and attainment programme in partnership with Lancashire and Greater Merseyside.

18. The national co-ordination team for widening participation, Action on Access, is led by and based at the University.

In developing this agreement, we are concerned to maintain our position as a major provider of higher education for mature students, first generation students, students from low income families and those from low participation neighbourhoods through the continued development of local partnerships. At the same time, we recognise the need to sustain appropriate retention and employability rates, to increase our recruitment from areas currently under-represented in our student profile and to recognise excellence. We seek to achieve this through a co-ordinated strategy of bursary and scholarship provision, outreach and infrastructure support.

2. Fee Level ¹

Edge Hill will set the following fee rates from September 2011:

Full-time	Fee
Bachelor and Foundation Degree students on HEFCE/TTA funded programmes including PGCE: (This includes students on Bachelor Degree programmes in partner institutions).	£3375 per annum
Students on full-time Nursing and Midwifery professional registration programmes:	exempted
Postgraduate (excluding PGCE):	Discretionary – apply to institution
Part-time	Fee
All students:	Discretionary – apply to institution

Rationale

The decision to charge the maximum variable fee in relation to full-time degree students has been taken in order to generate essential additional income both to maintain the quality of our learning and teaching provision and to further support delivery of our mission in terms of widening participation, implementation of our retention strategy and enhancement of the general student experience. It also provides an opportunity for us to directly support many of our students through

¹ Fees are subject to an annual inflation rise

the establishment of financial bursaries, study packages and scholarships. We have determined to charge the same fee across all subject areas so that ability, interest, motivation and commitment will remain the deciding factors in student programme choice rather than fee level. To do otherwise would, we believe, have a deleterious effect on student completion and employment.

3. Proportion of additional fee income to fund Bursaries, Scholarships, Outreach Work and further enhancement of the Student Experience

Edge Hill expects to set aside around 50% of the additional income generated over the the first five years of this agreement (2006/07 – 2010/11). The University will maintain its commitment to outreach work and to supporting students financially after 2011 in ways that are appropriate in the new funding environment.

3.1 Bursaries and Scholarships for new entrants from 2011 ²

Edge Hill is committed to the provision of direct support to students both as a means of stimulating recruitment from low participation neighbourhoods and under-represented groups and as a means of encouraging retention through the recognition of excellence. We also recognise the challenges facing families whose income lies just above the limit for full state support and those who have a number of children to support through higher education. Our bursary and scholarship provision is geared to ensuring we make a significant difference in these areas and is the major platform for this agreement.

The Edge Hill schemes for new entrants from 2011/12³ (including deferred entrants) are summarised below. Full details are available on application to the institution⁴. The financial bursaries are only available to UK/EU students on HEFCE/TTA funded full-time, bachelor degree provision (including PGCE where the full fee is chargeable). Other scholarships are open to full-time undergraduate students/prospective students across all Faculties.

Edge Hill will not undertake means-testing. Eligibility for financial bursaries which are dependent on income will be determined by reference to LEA/SLC assessment for UK/EU students. Bursaries and scholarships are paid in one or two cash instalments unless otherwise indicated below.

i. Financial Bursaries

- a. £500 per annum for those receiving the maximum government grant (anticipated in excess of 50% of students) (includes mandatory top-up)
- b. £750 per annum for Care Leavers

² Students who entered the University earlier than 2011 are covered by the arrangements published in the Access Agreement in approval at that time.

³ Major changes to the funding of higher education are currently under consideration by the Government. The University is unable to make any commitments beyond 2011/12.

⁴ Contact the Fees team in Academic Registry

ii. **Excellence Scholarships** ⁵

Scholarships are available to applicants and on-course students unless otherwise specified.

- a. Sporting excellence (*open competition*)
- b. Excellence in Performance Arts (*open competition*)
- c. Excellence in Creative Arts (*open competition*)
- d. Excellence through Volunteering (*open competition*)
- e. Excellence through Access (*nomination*) (*Entrance only*)

62 annually at £2000 (over 3 years) or £1000 (over 2 years)

iii. **Academic Achievement Scholarships** ⁶

60 annually at £500 awarded on merit to on-course students.

iv. **Academic Merit Entrance Scholarships**

£1000 to all entrants achieving 360 UCAS points.

The University also supports 4 Helena Kennedy scholarships each year, valued at £2000.

3.2 Outreach Activities

Edge Hill already operates a high level of outreach activities to support our Widening Participation Strategy.

We offer a full menu of outreach activities covering HE Experience Days, Study Skills and Revision workshops, Preparation for HE (including student life and finance awareness), Parents events, Access programmes and staff development for Connexions staff and school careers teachers/advisors. Our current spend on these activities is in excess of £500,000 per annum.

In addition to this commitment, Edge Hill invests more than 10% of the new income generated from variable fees to enhance our Widening Participation work through aspiration-raising activities and targeted post entry support. In further developing our outreach strategy, new income has allowed us to target our activities much more specifically towards awareness-raising amongst those who have a strong influencing impact on learners who may not previously have considered higher education as an option. In particular, we look to reach out to parents, minority ethnic and other community groups and advisory services such as Connexions. We are committed to the following **new** work and will review our position in relation to further projects annually in the light of actual income received. Many of these projects commenced in 2005 requiring an up-front spend in advance of income receipt.

⁵ The University may increase the number and variety of scholarships available under this scheme

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We are currently actively involved in 2 sub-regional Aimhigher Projects (Greater Merseyside and Lancashire) providing a range of aspiration and attainment raising activities from Years 8 –13 plus development of progression routes for mature, part-time and WBL students.

Aspiration-raising

Edge Hill believes that aspiration-raising and attainment is the single most important factor in lifting the number of students from disadvantaged and low-income families entering higher education. We already work closely with local schools and colleges and the advisory services to identify potential and encourage participation. In addition to our current work we aim to:

- Develop and deliver a structured aspiration and awareness raising programme for Care Leavers, to include carers and Social Services Professionals.
- Provide subject-based sessions/master-classes at selected schools/colleges delivered by Edge Hill academic staff from all disciplines. This is estimated at 75 events in the first year with anticipated growth over the life of the agreement.
- Develop strategy and targeted activities aimed at increasing black and minority ethnic recruitment through an additional appointment to the Widening participation team. Specifically this will include new marketing and information publications and liaison with community groups.
- Deliver targeted taster days/events for parents and minority ethnic groups.
- Continue to work with a range of employer and FE partners to develop new Foundation Degree provision targeted towards mature, part-time and low participation groups.
- Work towards the delivery of Preparation for HE courses to targeted groups of undergraduate students following a successful pilot in 2006.
- Provide sessions to support General Studies teaching to support local Schools and Colleges and to further raise pupil aspirations.
- Work across Lancashire and Greater Merseyside partnerships in support of the new 14-19 Diplomas to provide academic input into curriculum design and development to ensure equality of access to HE for Diploma students and support IAG and senior manager expertise in the development of the Transitions strand to ensure appropriate progression routes are available.
- Develop strategy and targeted activities aimed at increasing the recruitment of young, white males from deprived and low participation areas.

Information provision

Raising aspiration must be accompanied by clear and accurate information about the opportunities available and the costs involved so that students can make real choices. Our ongoing programme of information provision includes:

- Ensuring that clear information about the financial implications of the university's learning opportunities is available to all potential students through their channel of choice including websites, printed information, face-to-face contact at outreach events and Open Days.

- Developing and delivering financial support advice sessions in the region in conjunction with local LEAs and current students. (Target group – parents)
- Further developing the Pre-entry Guidance Service.
- Researching the effectiveness of communication of the Edge Hill financial package and adapting information accordingly.
- Further promoting progression opportunities from FE to HE especially through existing Partner Colleges which recruit from low participation neighbourhoods.
- Targeting communications in low participation neighbourhoods.
- Highlighting the benefits of HE coupled with affordability messages based on national and EHU initiatives.
- Delivering awareness sessions for Aimhigher Co-ordinators and Connexions staff
- Exploitation of new technologies such as internet social networking to engage and communicate with potential students about all aspects of progression to HE.

Post-entry support

Edge Hill believes that the levels of personal and academic support provided for students whilst on-course are crucial in encouraging non-traditional students to enter higher education. This is especially true for first generation students, mature students, students with disabilities and some minority ethnic groups. Equally, an essential part of aspiration-raising relies on generating learner confidence around debt management and the added value of a degree in gaining employment. The following activities build on the life-cycle support model employed at Edge Hill and are especially important to the recruitment of under-represented groups:

- Development of specific mentoring schemes for minority ethnic students and other targeted groups.
- The establishment of learner/student support schemes within each Faculty to identify study skills/learning needs.
- Further development of the Edge Hill Job Shop to provide monitored employment opportunities for students.
- Development of specific careers guidance input for applicants and new entrants.
- Development of work placement schemes as options for all undergraduate provision.
- Enhancement of the FirstWeek programme and mentoring schemes to ensure one-to-one as well as group relationships are established.
- Establishment and maintenance of a designated contact worker in support of Care Leavers entering and progressing through University and development of a specific peer support 'buddying' scheme for Care Leavers.

These activities and those under 4 below will be supported through the annual budget review to provide additional staff, essential training/staff development and materials/equipment.

4 Strategies to provide information on financial support to prospective students, their families and schools

Edge Hill already provides prospective students and their families with a range of information including financial support options. These are reviewed annually to ensure scholarships and other new initiatives are included to give a complete and integrated picture of student financial support which demystifies what can often be seen as a complex area. We see the provision of high quality information in this area as key to the success of our strategies. Planned activities include:

- Annual revision of prospectus information
- Development of web-based applicant and general guidance services
- Inclusion of financial advice sessions/resource packs in all our recruitment events.
- Using our local connections to ensure coverage in print and broadcast media.
- Further development of the 'Red-Alert' budget management materials and the on-line 'Survival' financial guide for prospective and current students.

Specific information on bursaries and scholarships and general financial information will be posted out in response to enquiries and specifically to all applicants who are made an offer of a place. Offers will also indicate the aggregate cost of the programme.

Information provision is further supplemented by activities detailed in 3.2.

5 Objectives and Milestones

The objectives of the Access Plan are:

1. To further enhance our recruitment and retention of students with excellent potential from under-represented backgrounds.
2. To ensure the maintenance and development of a high quality environment and academic experience for students which recognises the challenges of disadvantage and enhances retention and achievement.

Success can be measured in many ways, not all of them easily translated into simple performance indicators. Specifically however, we will be looking to:

1. Raise our market share of applications in general and from under-represented groups in particular. (UCAS statistics)
2. Raise the number of recruited Care Leavers over the life of the Plan. (internal monitoring)
3. Improve our offer conversion rates for under-represented groups. (UCAS statistics)
4. Raise the proportion of recruited students from low participation neighbourhoods by two percentage points over the five year period (one point after two years). (HEFCE Performance Indicators)
5. Raise the proportion of recruited black and minority ethnic students and students with disabilities by at least two percentage points over the five year period (one point after two years). (HEFCE Performance Indicators)

6. Maintain retention rates within benchmark. (HEFCE Performance Indicators)
7. Ensure employability rates are at least one percentage point above benchmark over the life of the agreement. (HEFCE Performance Indicators)

All the above outcomes can be measured from HESA/UCAS data and will be internally monitored annually. An annual report based on HEFCE, UCAS and internal monitoring data will be made to the Equality, Widening Access and Student Support Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Academic Board. The report will include progress towards milestones and proposals for amendments to the strategy in order to better meet planned objectives in the light of experience. Information from the internal report will be used to inform the OFFA requirement to report through the HEFCE annual monitoring statement. Any proposals for change to the objectives/fee levels will be determined by Directorate following appropriate consultation and forwarded to OFFA for consideration.

**Approved Edge Hill University Directorate and Board of Governors: October 2007
Revised November 2010**