

**BISHOP GROSSETESTE COLLEGE**  
**ACCESS AGREEMENT**  
**for submission to the Office of Fair Access**

**1. BGC’s commitment to widening access**

The introductory sentence in BGC’s Mission Statement indicates the College’s commitment to attract a diverse student population:

*“We will strive to achieve excellence in all that we do within an environment that is fair, open and welcoming of diverse groups.”*

BGC is an open, forward looking community that celebrates diversity and welcomes applications from all students regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religious affiliation or disability. The College is committed to widening access and aims to encourage applications from all communities, particularly those currently under-represented in higher education generally and at BGC specifically.

**2. The student population at BGC**

BGC has been successful in recruiting students from the state sector, low socio-economic groups and low participation backgrounds as shown in the HESA Performance Indicators table below.

<b>HESA Performance Indicators 2002-2003</b>			
	<b>Actual (%)</b>	<b>Benchmark (%)</b>	<b>Location- adjusted Benchmark (%)</b>
State Schools (entrants)	94.9	90.0	91.8
Low Social Class (young entrants)	48.9	30.5	33.3
Low Participation Neighbourhoods (young entrants)	18.2	14.2	14.8

The HESA Performance Indicators 2001/02 indicated that BGC had the highest proportion of first degree students from social classes IIIM and below of any HEI in the country (47% against a benchmark of 31%). The most recent Performance Indicators (2002/03) show that recruitment of students from low social classes continues to be very high at 48.9%. We will build on current strategies to increase levels of recruitment from this group.

Of the current (2004/05) undergraduate student population at BGC:

- 44% receive full fee waiver (household income less than £21,000);
- 21% receive partial fee waiver (household income between £21,000 & £32,000);
- 35% pay fees in full (household income above £32,000).

Our proposed Access Agreement builds on current strategies to maintain strong recruitment and retention from low income groups.

The recruitment of students from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups has continued to be a challenge for the College. The current student population has 1.4% from these groups. Whilst recognising the challenge posed by the geographical location of the College (Lincolnshire has one of the lowest BME populations in the UK - 1.3%, and 46% of BGC's current student population come from the county), there is a commitment to undertake cross-College work to increase participation from BME groups and to enhance facilities and services to support students from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

The HESA Performance Indicators 2002/03 show there is a gap between the College's benchmark for recruitment of students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (2.7%) and actual recruitment (0.7%). Recent adaptations for disabled students, staff and visitors have extended to the whole estate, greatly improving accessibility. Strategies will be developed to raise the awareness of improved facilities and support amongst potential students.

The College has continued to achieve high retention rates year on year, exceeding the HESA benchmark. Figures for 2002/03 show a non-continuation level of 6.2% compared with the benchmark of 8.5%. This achievement has taken place within the context of students entering BGC from an ever-widening range of backgrounds. However, the College is not content to rest on this historical record. Given the College's commitment to recruit increasing numbers of students from diverse backgrounds, it is acknowledged that maintaining high levels of retention will be challenging. Accordingly, BGC's financial plan includes investment in staff and resources to enhance student support at the College.

### **3. Fee levels**

From 2006/07, BGC intends to charge a tuition fee of £3,000 a year for all full-time undergraduate programmes.

Gap year students who defer their places before 1 August 2005 and start in September 2006 will not be required to pay this new fee.

At the time of writing, there is insufficient information available about future levels of support for part-time students for decisions to be made about charging variable fees to these students.

The fee level for PGCE programmes will be retained at £1,200, the same as before the new system was introduced, for 2006/07 at least. PGCE students will not be eligible for the bursaries described in 4i).

The College will apply only such increases to the fee as are approved by the Government to take account of inflation.

#### 4. Use of additional fee income

A separate finance sheet provides details of the College's intended use of additional fees to support access measures.

BGC has no existing bursary arrangements for its undergraduate students, hence some of the additional fee income will be used to enhance staffing in the areas of student support and finance.

The College will subscribe to the model bursary scheme as devised by UUK/SCOP for the purpose of providing the poorest students with an annual bursary of £300.

It is proposed that:

- i) all undergraduate students eligible for a full or partial maintenance grant (residual household income below £37,425 for 2006 entrants) receive a non-repayable bursary of £1,000 for **each year** of their undergraduate programme. This will provide a strong, clear message to students and will provide support to both low and middle income families. The estimated total annual cost per cohort will be £195k, representing 36% of the additional £540k fee income;
- ii) the bursaries will be paid as cash. Students will be given the option of paying for goods and services related to their studies (e.g. College accommodation costs, IT equipment) before receiving their bursary to help them to manage their money well;
- iii) a new discretionary bursary fund be managed by the Student Support Team to allow the College to offer further assistance to any student whose financial hardship remains unresolved after seeking financial support from all other sources, including the Access to Learning Fund. This is in recognition of the fact that financial deterrents to progression into and within higher education are not only associated with variable fees. The annual cost of the discretionary bursary fund would be £15,000;
- iv) additional staff be appointed to the Widening Participation Team to enhance the College's current outreach and aspiration-raising work with a particular focus on targeting local areas where progression to HE is low and maintaining or improving current recruitment levels from the poorest families. Activities will include campus events, curriculum workshops and visits to targeted schools and colleges. Work will also be undertaken to support the recruitment of students from other groups currently under-represented at the College, i.e. disabled students and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The total annual cost of additional staffing and consumables in the first year will be approximately £40,000. The current level of staff dedicated to widening participation outreach work will be increased by 100%, and it is expected that there will be a comparable increase in the number of people reached through this work.

The bursary schemes will be available to all eligible undergraduate students ordinarily resident in the UK. The College will take note of legal developments relating to the potential obligation to provide support to non-UK EU students and will act appropriately.

#### 5. Provision of information to students

The intended fees (with appropriate disclaimers) have been set out in the College's 2006 prospectus together with information about intended College bursaries and other financial support.

A webpage on the College's website will go live following OFFA's approval of BGC's Access Agreement. This will include the fees to be charged for the duration of each programme. The website will provide the means of keeping prospective students, their parents and their advisers up-to-date with on-going developments in relation to student finance.

A booklet setting out information about fees, loans and bursaries, together with advice on budgeting and financial management, will be printed following the approval of the College's Access Agreement. This will be available to all prospective applicants attending open days and other events on campus and will be used, as appropriate, at local events designed to widen access. All undergraduate applicants to BGC from 2006 onwards will receive a copy of this booklet.

The College's Student Support Team will provide an enhanced range of provision designed to help students to understand the new fee and bursary arrangements and to develop appropriate strategies to manage their finances. These will include:

- Money Management workshops for prospective and current students covering budgeting and strategies to manage limited budgets;
- money advice from experienced money advisers who will provide one-to-one support on budgeting effectively and dealing with debt;
- advisers available to prospective and current students for one-to-one consultations in person, by e-mail or by telephone.

Returning existing students will be reminded, via written communications from the Academic Registry in the summer of 2006, that variable fees do not apply to them.

One-to-one support, finance workshops and other supportive activities organised by the College will be made available to all BGC students.

## 6. Milestones

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Success indicators to be used</i>
To continue to recruit state school entrants at a level that exceeds the HESA benchmark.	BGC performance to exceed the HESA location-adjusted benchmark by at least 3% annually.
To maintain very high recruitment levels of students from social classes 4 to 7.	BGC performance to exceed the HESA location-adjusted benchmark by at least 15% annually.
To maintain high levels of recruitment from low income groups.	Current percentage of new students from low income households (those who receive maximum state support) maintained annually.
To improve recruitment of disabled students.	To progress towards the HESA benchmark each year and to achieve the benchmark by 2009.
To improve the application, offer rate and recruitment of students from black and minority ethnic groups.	Achieve student intake target of 4.6% by 2007.
To maintain high levels of retention with an increasingly diverse student population.	BGC performance to exceed the HESA location-adjusted benchmark by at least 2% annually.
To provide high quality information, support and operational efficiency in the College's operation of the Access Agreement.	Achieve annual student satisfaction levels of at least 75%.

## 7. Monitoring arrangements

The College will monitor its fulfilment of this Agreement via the Recruitment and Retention Standing Group (RRSG) which reports to the Academic Planning Committee, a sub-committee of Academic Board. The RRSG will consider progress made towards the milestones shown above. In addition, it will consider feedback from students on the new bursary schemes and the new student support systems. Feedback will be given to Directorate at regular intervals. The Access Agreement will be a standing item on the agenda for the Financial, Employment and General Purposes Committee of the Board of Governors. Annual monitoring reports will be considered by the Diversity and Equality Committee.