

ANGLIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

OFFA ACCESS AGREEMENT

1 Introduction and context

APU intends to raise its tuition fees for full-time home/EU undergraduate students above the standard level to those who start their courses from September 2006. This Agreement explains the measures we will be taking to safeguard and promote fair access for under-represented groups.

APU's regional mission, as expressed in its *Strategy Statement* and *Corporate Plan*, is 'to extend and facilitate access to higher education by reaching out into the community, particularly to areas where take-up is low, and to people who could benefit from it but for whatever reason(s) encounter obstacles to entry'.

The University has gone far towards achieving its objective: 70% of our students are classified as 'mature', and 58% study part-time. In terms of social class, 32% of the young (18-21) students for whom we have complete data come from SECs 4-7, a figure better than our 'benchmark'.

We are not complacent: maintaining (and improving) our current position will involve major effort over the next five years. We do not envisage any radical new initiatives as a result of the new fee regime, but rather using additional income to provide bursaries beyond the statutory minimum and enhance activities already being undertaken, both by ourselves as an institution and in co-operation with our regional HE counterparts and other institutions and bodies under the auspices of Aimhigher:P4P. The document indicates those areas where a substantial degree of 'additionality' is anticipated.

2 Fees

APU will raise its full-time undergraduate tuition fees to £3,000 p.a for home/EU students who start their courses from September 2006. Fees will be subject to annual inflationary rises.

3 Bursaries and other financial support for students

APU will provide a £300 p.a bursary to those students in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant of £2,700 p.a. We plan to sign up to the UUK/SLC model bursary scheme for the administration of these.

We will also provide significant bursaries for **all** of our target groups of students (see Section 7) as they progress successfully through their studies at APU, as follows:

For students from low income backgrounds (those on full state support), the minimum bursaries, spread over the duration of the course, will be:

For those on two-year courses	£1,600
For those on three-year courses	£2,400

For other target groups (not from low income backgrounds) the minimum bursaries, spread over the duration of the course, will be:

For those on two-year courses	£1,000
For those on three-year courses	£1,500

Bursaries will be subject to annual inflationary increases.

We indicate on the attached *pro forma* the estimated amount of additional income that we shall spend on bursaries and outreach activities.

4 Information provided to students

From a potential applicant's first contact with APU we aim to provide accurate, informative and timely help and advice throughout the application process, by:

- providing dedicated Freefone response numbers
- maintaining a 'one stop shop' Contact centre, to provide information and guidance to applicants.
- providing information on financial matters on the University's web-site and in the Prospectus: this will be refined, as appropriate, for 2006 entrants in early 2005.
- giving further financial information in the 'Joining Pack' sent to students before registration at APU.
- publishing, from 2006, an integrated regional prospectus, indicating at which regional partner colleges particular subjects can be studied, and in what mode.
- supporting local, college-based, prospectuses.
- making it clear that students may elect to defer their tuition fees until after they have graduated and earning in excess of £15,000 p.a (subject to inflationary increases and Government changes). These Government loans will be at a zero real rate of interest.

It is clear that 'debt aversion' could be a major problem for those groups that the Access Agreement covers: consequently, we will

- maximise publicity for Bursaries and other means of financial support.
- indicate the level of support students can expect to receive and how it will be assessed; the aggregate costs of tuition; and the net costs of study.
- stress the 'graduate premium': hard facts and figures in recruitment literature showing that graduates can expect to earn more than non-graduates.
- use Open Days to convey financial information and reassurance, providing sessions targeted at parents and giving guidance on costs, fees, loans etc.
- provide, through Student Support Services on each main campus, a full range of financial advice and guidance, including budget-planning.
- ensure that new Student Centres in central locations on both campuses are highly-visible, encouraging 'drop-in' sessions for students to discuss informally their financial concerns
- make it clear that it is Government policy that the poorest students (those in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant of £2,700 as it will exist in 2006) should receive a total package of support that at least equals the amount of their tuition fees.

We are committed to:

- establishing the projected requirements for counselling, and financial advice over the next 5 years by December 2004 and making available the necessary resources to support these.
- further expanding these services as a result of the additional income available from fees.
- including 'cost of living' data for our core (Cambridge and Essex) campuses in the 2006 Prospectus, with local information in regional colleges' own publications.
- putting this information on the web, so that prospective students can pull down a locally-tailored cost-of-living calculation.

5 Outreach Work: pre-entry

For many years, APU has actively sought out students from non-traditional backgrounds rather than simply waiting for them to take the first step into HE. It believes that the 'student experience' starts with the pre-entry processes. This is particularly important because a large proportion of our applicants are 'first generation' HE students whose parents and peers have had little or no direct experience of HE on which they can draw.

Pre-entry activities include:

- developing and maintaining links with schools through our Schools and Colleges Liaison Unit. It is expected that some of the additional funding from fee income will be devoted to expanding this activity and especially to the necessary staff development.
- working with school children from an early age to raise aspirations, for example through the YPIHE (Young People into Higher Education) programme in association with our AUEE partners.
- our 'Students as Mentors' scheme. Students go into local schools, for example to help children with reading difficulties and by so doing act as 'ambassadors' for HE, breaking down the 'mystique' of 'going to University'. We would anticipate that additional income would be used to extend this scheme, especially in the more rural parts of our region.
- more formal links with schools through the 'APU Accord', which encourages students to investigate the relationship between their studies and interests and APU courses, to ease the transition from school/college to University.

A particular problem in the East of England is the lack of progression from FE Level 3 to HE: many well-qualified students fail to make the transition. Consequently, our widening participation strategies will increasingly target this group. We will:

- encourage FE college group visits to APU by students who would not otherwise consider progression.
- use additional fee income to develop 'FE-Versity', launched with our regional partner colleges in 2004 to raise FE3 students' awareness of the local HE opportunities available to them and encourage application to suitable courses. It will include subject-specific talks by APU staff in colleges, 'taster sessions' of HE, HE 'surgeries' and advice sessions at colleges and input by APU staff to existing local HE promotional activity within colleges, such as open days and parents evenings.
- develop the 'ALFHE' project (Adult Learners into Further and Higher Education), a joint initiative between APU, the University of Cambridge, the Open University and four Cambridgeshire FE colleges. This aims to give general support, advice and guidance to mature (19-30) FE students, especially those on Access courses where there is a significant failure to progress to HE. It is currently funded by Aimhigher:P4P, but continuation funding cannot be guaranteed: we would expect to use a proportion of our fee income to ensure continuance of the programme and its extension to other counties in the East of England.

More generally, we will:

- promote wide coverage of APU (and HE generally) in the local and regional media. 'Success stories' breed aspiration and thus further success.
- continue to organise local 'Celebration of Achievement' events and high-profile Award Ceremonies, at various regional venues
- attend local events, such as county agricultural shows, to raise awareness of HE among both young people and their parents. Here we anticipate using fee income to enable a more sophisticated level of display by (for example) the use of interactive technology.

6 Retention

APU has long recognised that 'widening participation' does not just mean getting more non-traditional students to enter HE, but supporting them through what may be an unexpectedly traumatic experience, especially in the early stages. We believe that our retention policies, currently being refined in the light of our 2003-4 Retention Research Project, fall within the scope of OFFA 2004/01 and should thus form part of the Agreement, as we anticipate substantial investment from 2006 (amounting to £434,000 and aimed at all target groups by 2008-9) to take forward the Project's recommendations, including:

- fine-tuning Induction Programmes to make them small-scale subject-based events designed so that students can quickly meet both other students and the staff who will be teaching them..
- organising more social events, field trips and further induction-type activities during the first semester to encourage early 'bonding', cohort identity and mutual support mechanisms.
- developing the 'What I am doing here anyway?' Q&A self help pages on the University web-site, which give students guidance as to the support available against the main issues that cause early withdrawal.

Other activities that will benefit all students, but especially those from our target groups, include:

- curriculum rationalisation: fewer courses mean that students will stay together much more in cohorts (and thus be able to support each other). It will also mean more regular contact with a smaller number of academics and thus the opportunity to discuss problems (actual or potential) more freely.
- acting on evidence that over-assessment in Semester 1 has been a major factor in early student withdrawals. Consequently, assessment in this semester will be formative rather than summative, to identify weaknesses at an early stage.
- ensuring that all leavers are made aware of the options for return to study at a later stage and given contact details for further information which can be considered later when the emotional pressure is less.
- setting up a retention website to draw together materials about retention issues from across the Regional University Partnership to enable the sharing of good practice between academic staff.
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7 Target groups

APU's target groups include those identified by OFFA in 2004/01, Annex C:

- people from low income backgrounds
- people from lower socio-economic groups (as defined in published Performance Indicator tables)
- minority ethnic groups
- disabled people

together with one significant addition: people living in areas remote from HEIs.

We are currently succeeding in attracting the low income/socio-economic group students at least as well as any comparator institution. The other groups, however, deserve comment:

Minority ethnic groups: that part of the East of England in which the University traditionally recruits does not have a large number of people from ethnic minorities. Consequently, the number of students drawn from these is unlikely to increase dramatically in the near future. Nonetheless, we will work to identify the location of these groups and their unmet learning and cultural needs.

Disabled people: we will continue actively to encourage applications from students with disabilities (including physical impairments, sensory impairments, unseen medical conditions, learning difficulties and mental health conditions. We will:

- continue to direct such applicants to Learning Support Teams in Student Services in order that the level of support they will require for successful study can be arranged.
- help applicants to access financial support, where required.
- give high priority to making all parts of the Cambridge Campus accessible to people with mobility problems (the on-going Rivermead development at Essex has been designed with their requirements specifically in mind).
- extend induction loop facilities to all teaching and other public accommodation.

- ensure full compliance with the DDA by 2006.
- support the East Anglian Regional Access Centre (EARAC), which is based at APU: the skills of its assessors are critical to the task of enabling people with disabilities to gain access to HE in the region and beyond.
- maintain a full range of information for applicants with disabilities (including 'hidden' disabilities) on the University's web-site.

People from living in remote areas: East Anglia has a dispersed population and a public transport network that restricts the 'travel-to-study' area of its HEIs. Many potential students also lack access to private transport, which reflects in part the existence of significant pockets of rural and urban deprivation. The latter are exemplified by Thurrock, Basildon, Harlow, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, the former by North Cambridgeshire, NW Norfolk and the Tendring Peninsula.

We will:

- ensure, through our network of regional partner colleges that HE is available to anyone in the region who could benefit from it
- use innovative means to deliver this promise, for example blended learning techniques that will make it possible for students to study in their own homes or in partner colleges' 'outreach' centres (currently largely FE) where already established.
- ensure that seamless progression routes from sub-degree to degree-level work are always available
- explore ways by which students in rural areas can more easily access our main campuses, for example by using the already well-established bus networks set up by some regional partner colleges (such as Cambridge Regional College).
- assess the feasibility of expansion in those parts of the region where there is a large potential market for HE but as yet limited provision: our priority areas are Thurrock and the Harlow/Stansted/M11 corridor.

It is difficult to estimate the 'reach' of our proposals with any degree of precision. However, within the 'Four Counties' from which the bulk of recruitment comes there are 26 colleges and 179 schools with 16-18 year-old students (i.e those more directly affected by this Agreement), of whom there are 71,984 in all. To these must be added younger students (especially 14/15 year-olds) and the very substantial number of 16-18 year-olds currently outside the formal educational system but who we hope will, in future, be retained as a result of LSC, college and HEI activity.

8 Milestones and objectives

Our objective remains that outlined in the first paragraph of this document, one to which the University and its predecessors have been committed since the middle of the 19th century and which they are proud to proclaim today: HE for the people of our region, whenever and wherever they wish to access it.

In the context of the Access Agreement, our milestones (based on current HEFCE/HESA categories and figures) are:

Target Group	current	2007-08	2010-11
Young f/t undergraduate students % from state schools % from SECs 4-7 % from low-participation neighbourhoods	96.7 33.3 13.6	97.0 35.0 18.0	98.0 38.0 21.0
Mature f/t undergraduate students % all undergraduate, no previous HE and from low-participation neighbourhoods	12.7	13.5	16.5
Part time students % young people, no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods % mature, as above	12.3 6.7	14.5 10.0	17.5 12.0
Students in receipt of DSA % f/t undergraduate % p/t undergraduate	1.0 0.4	2.9 1.0	3.5 2.0
Ethnic/non-white % of all students	21.0	23.0	24.0

These milestones will be monitored by:

- existing published data (HEFCE/HESA)
 - APU's Performance Indicators Scrutiny Group
 - Regional Principals' Strategic Policy Group
 - the annual APU Strategic Planning Round (meetings between the Directorate and Deans of Faculty)
- and overseen by the Governing Body.

Glossary

APU	Anglia Polytechnic University
AUEE	Association of Universities of the East of England
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
FE Level 3	A/AS Levels BTEC National Qualifications NVQ3 Vocational A Levels
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
SEC	National Statistics Socio-economic Classification
SLC	Student Loan Company
UUK	Universities UK