

STOCKPORT COLLEGE OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Access Agreement January 2005

1. Introduction

The Corporation of Stockport College of Further & Higher Education agreed to the introduction of tuition fees above the standard level for directly funded courses from September 2006. Under the Higher Education Act 2004 the College is therefore required to produce an access agreement which sets out how it will safeguard and promote safe access.

2. Fee Limits

The new fees will be charged to students entering full time courses from September 2006 onwards. Part time fees will remain the same for 2006-2007.

2.1 Level of Fees

2.2.1 Full Time Students. All students on full time degree programmes and higher national diploma programmes will be charged a top-up fee bringing the total fee charged to £2500 per student. This fee will be charged on all full time programmes.

2.2.2 Part Time Students. Students on part time degree programmes and higher national certificate programmes will not be charged a top-up fee from September 2006 other than the normal cost of living rise in fees. This position will be reviewed during the first year of the access agreement.

2.2 Publicising Fees

The College proposes to use a number of methods to publicise fees and the associated bursaries and support. The key ones are:

- An insert in all prospectuses already printed indicating the level of fee to be charged from September 2006.
- Information on fees and bursaries will be published on the College website from September 2005 onwards.
- Through information packs prepared for all prospective students from September 2005 onwards
- Through information sessions to be held with prospective students in year 12 of Stockport Further Education Colleges during 2004 – 2005 (these will be the first entrants under the new fees structure)

2.3 Gap Year Students

Students who apply for a September 2005 who are accepted and have the entry qualifications will not be charged the increased fee even if

they then defer for 12 months. Students who defer for more than 12 months (i.e. a September 2007 start) will be charged the increased fee.

3. Use of Additional Fee Income

The table on the cover of the access agreement shows the level of income anticipated from the additional fee income over the period of the agreement . The additional fees will be used to:

- (i) provide a means tested bursary
- (ii) provide direct support for students prior to joining the College and during their study at the College.
- (iii) Investing in the Higher Education infrastructure of the College to provide resources for both staff and students which will enhance the HE experience.

4. Bursaries

Currently the College does not offer a bursary scheme. The additional fees allow the College to offer a means tested bursary which will be available to eligible students from September 2006. The bursary will be determined on a sliding scale as indicated in the table below. Students whose parental income is less than £15,000 will receive a bursary of £1000 whereas students whose parental income is between £25000 - £34999 will receive a bursary of £450. It is anticipated that this bursary will be paid through the Student Loan Company using the local authority income assessment tool.

Independent Learners who are assessed as independent through the local authority income assessment will receive the maximum bursary.

Parental income	Annual Bursary
Less than £15,000	1000
£15,000 - £24,999	750
£25,000 - £34,999	450

5. Other Financial Support

A limited means tested hardship fund will also be available to all students who can demonstrate an urgent need for assistance. This will be administered through the College's Student Admissions and Support unit using existing procedures. Currently the College runs a limited hardship fund which is often undersubscribed. The greater awareness raised by the full package being offered will overcome any barriers which may exist.

6. Support Co-ordinators

Of the additional income generated from top-up fees approximately 30% will be invested in a number of support co-ordinators. These support co-ordinators will work closely with higher staff who oversee the transition from school to further education. Although working with the College's Higher Education Unit they will be line managed through the College's Students Admissions and Support Department. This will ensure close linkage between the FE support and HE support. The key objectives of the role are:

- Working with students in secondary schools with a history of low participation in HE to develop links with both further and higher education
- Ensuring a smooth transition for learners from sixth forms in schools or college to HE
- Enabling mature learners to enter HE through outreach activities
- Identifying support needs, including study skills, and ensuring that this support is available on an individual and group basis
- Developing specific activities to support learners from non-traditional backgrounds. These may include buddying schemes (involving past students at key points), providing access to learning resources outside normal times and designing timetables which recognise most students will need to carry out limited part time work.
- Ensuring progression from HE programmes by developing employer engagement and identifying further academic/training opportunities with partner HEIs.

7. Outreach Activity

The outreach activity of the College will be centred on the work of the support co-ordinators. Whilst outreach activities will be focused on close working with local schools and colleges it will also encompass work with mature learners who wish to access HE programmes. It will include summer schools, tasters and master classes.

There will also be opportunities for the support co-ordinators to work in the community centres within the Borough of Stockport to promote HE opportunities to mature returners. Initially these activities will be termly at six key centres

8. Milestones

The College intends to use two linked measures, widening participation postcodes and eligibility for bursaries. The baseline figures suggest that

	Baseline	Intermediate milestone	Longer term milestone
Date for review		Dec 2007	Dec 2008
Number of learners from WP postcode	35%	40%	45%
Percentage of learners eligible for bursary	65%	70%	70%
Success rates*	56%	58%	60%

* success will be measured using the product of retention over the whole course and achievement by the expected end date.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting

The College's Higher Education Unit will monitor the effectiveness of the access agreement. This will be carried out termly with an evaluation report sent to the Senior Management Team. The report will cover

- Enrolments of students eligible for bursaries
- Enrolments of students from WP postcodes
- Performance of students eligible for bursaries.
- Recommendations on future use of bursaries
- Success rates

The Senior Management Team will determine any actions required as a result of the report and propose changes. If the proposed changes have an impact on the access agreement this will need to be ratified by the College's Corporation prior to submission to OFFA for agreement.