

NEW COLLEGE STAMFORD

OFFA ACCESS AGREEMENT

1 Introduction and context

New College Stamford is a small Further Education College in South Lincolnshire. Three HE courses are currently offered on a full-time basis –

- Dip HE in Business Information Systems
- BA Fine Art
- BA Graphic Design

although it is likely that Foundation Degrees in Lens Based Media, Conservation and Restoration and Early Years Services will commence in September 2007.

Most of our HE students are recruited from our FE courses. We have little part time HE work.

NCS intends to raise its tuition fees for full-time home/EU undergraduate students above the standard level for students 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.

The college has most of its HE programmes validated by The University of Lincoln and this agreement is intended to mirror that of the university where appropriate.

The college as part of its Higher Education Strategy wishes 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 College has gone some way towards achieving its objective: Currently about 32% of our full time students are classified as 'mature', 48% are from households with an income of less than £22000 a year and 12% of our full time students come to us with learning difficulties.

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, in co-operation with our validating universities under the auspices of Aimhigher. The document indicates those areas where a substantial degree of 'additionality' is anticipated.

2 Fees

New College Stamford (NCS) 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 may be subject to annual inflationary rises.

3 Bursaries and other financial support for students

NCS 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. We intend that these bursaries will be simple to claim and easy to administer.

Bursaries may be subject to annual inflationary increases.

We indicate, in Annex B (attached) the estimated amount of additional income that we anticipate we shall spend on bursaries and outreach activities.

4 Information provided to students

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

- maintaining a 'one stop shop' Contact centre, to provide information and guidance to applicants.
- providing information on financial matters on the College'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.
- 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, a full range of financial advice and guidance, including budget-planning.
- 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 and making available the necessary resources to support these.
- further expanding these services as a result of the additional income available from fees.
- providing 'cost of living' data for applicants to HE courses.

5 Outreach Work: pre-entry

NCS actively encourages applications students from non-traditional backgrounds. 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 or are returning to education as mature students.

Pre-entry activities include:

- Intensively marketing our HE programmes internally within the college
- Working closely with local schools and other FE colleges, marketing our programmes and holding Open Days but emphasising the advantages of studying locally for those who would not normally consider taking an HE programme.
- Working with local groups and societies to encourage mature students to attend college by opening the possibility of HE study.

Extra fee income will enable us to extend and intensify these activities.

More generally, we will continue to work with our validating universities to:

- promote wide coverage of HE generally in the local and regional media. 'Success stories' breed aspiration and thus further success.
- 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

The College 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, should thus form part of the Agreement.

Our current activities include:

- 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 social events, visits to art galleries and further induction-type activities during the first semester to encourage early 'bonding', cohort identity and mutual support mechanisms.
- 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.

7 Target groups

The target groups include those identified by OFFA in 2004/01, Annex C:

- people from low income backgrounds
- people from lower socio-economic groups
- minority ethnic groups
- disabled people

We believe that we are currently succeeding in attracting students from low income/socio-economic groups and mature students who would not ordinarily enter HE but the following require particular mention:

Minority ethnic groups: that part of the country from which the College normally 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 College accessible to those with physical disabilities
- ensure full compliance with the DDA by 2006.
- maintain a full range of information for applicants with disabilities (including 'hidden' disabilities) on the College's web-site.

8 Milestones and objectives

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
f/t undergraduate students % from SEGs 4-7 % from low income households	53% 48%	54% 49%	55% 50%
Mature f/t undergraduate students	32.3%	33%	34%
Students with declared learning difficulties % f/t undergraduate	11.8%	12.0%	13.0%
Ethnic/non-white % of f/t students	2.9%	3.5%	4.0%

These milestones will be monitored by:

- Existing published data (including HEFCE/HESA)
- The College Quality Group and Senior Management Team

and overseen by our Governing Body.

We will endeavour to achieve these milestones but the above figures are based on a small number of students and thus could vary widely from year to year.