

Fair Access Agreement: 16 November 2010

(Originated 2004, Revised 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010)

INTRODUCTION

1. Northumbria University welcomes the invitation from the Office of Fair Access to submit its amended Access Agreement for approval. This document is valid for full time undergraduate entrants in the academic year 2011-12 and for the duration of their course.
2. The University supports OFFA's view that "fair access to higher education is about ensuring equality of opportunities for all those that have potential to benefit from it, irrespective of their background, schooling, or income", and welcomes the opportunity through its Access Agreement to demonstrate its long-standing commitment to these aims, and to make public its long track record of success.
3. This document contains three sections: the context within which this Access Agreement has been developed; a summary of the core points of the Access Agreement; and, Northumbria University's Widening Participation and Fair Access Plan.

CONTEXT

4. As is clear from our performance, widening participation has a high priority and is integral to Northumbria's marketing and student recruitment activity. This ensures consistency of delivery, continuity and a seamless pre-entry journey for all potential students in schools, colleges, employers and the wider community. As a consequence Northumbria can be justifiably proud of its record in widening participation, particularly the fact that it succeeds in meeting or exceeding its HEFCE widening participation benchmarks. Northumbria is an 'access-rich' University with excellent academic standards and first class care and support for its students – the latter point evidenced by the marked improvements in the University's National Student Survey outcomes for 2010.
5. It is important, however, that OFFA and other readers of this Access Agreement understand two important contextual issues which underpin our approach to providing financial support for our students.

Because approximately 50% of the University's students fall into categories "under-represented in higher education", widening participation is a core activity for Northumbria, not a bolt on. In practice we cannot draw a meaningful distinction between our work to widen participation and our mainstream recruitment activity, because the former makes a vital and positive contribution to the latter. (A team organisation chart showing the integrated nature of our Recruitment/WP support is enclosed as Appendix A).

In addition, despite the increasing demand for HE places, competition for students from under-represented groups has intensified considerably. However, raising the aspirations of students from such groups and then ultimately recruiting them, requires profound and deep seated cultural change (by definition a long term process). As a result this task still represents a significant challenge to all universities for whom recruitment of students from these groups is a core activity.

6. Nevertheless, the University recognises that it must do more. In this Access Agreement we have therefore set stretching targets for improving the proportion of our students who are under-represented in higher education, mindful, of course, that the distance we have travelled in meeting and exceeding our current benchmarks means that further significant growth will continue to be a very considerable challenge. We

propose to meet these targets by increasing our support to students from groups under-represented in higher education in the following ways.

- (i) A further strengthening of our widening participation and outreach activity.
- (ii) The maintenance of the mandatory targeted bursary scheme for all full-time undergraduates (on HEFCE funded programmes) who are in receipt of the full maintenance grant (those below the £25,000 family income threshold).
- (iii) Refocused and retargeted Northumbria Bursaries – available to all undergraduate (UG) students who pay tuition fees and who are in receipt of the full maintenance grant - worth £500 for each year of their course (those below the £25,000 family income threshold).

SUMMARY OF ACCESS AGREEMENT

7. Fees

On 11 October 2004 Northumbria's Board of Governors agreed the University should charge all FT entrants to HEFCE funded 3 and 4 year UG programmes, as well as full time UG programmes in Social Work and for the one year PGCE programme, the full allowable fee of £3000 in 2006/07. This fee has risen annually in line with the guidelines provided by OFFA and for new entrants in 2011 will be £3375. (Sandwich years and years abroad will continue to be charged at a standard 25% of the full fee). We will charge £2500 per year for Foundation degrees in the Built Environment and £3375 for the Information & Communications Technology Foundation Degree we deliver on campus. Charges for validated programmes but which are delivered by our partner colleges are a matter for them to determine through their own Access Agreements with OFFA. We will not charge an additional fee to any "end-on" applicants. All additional fees described above will only be increased annually by the agreed amount during the lifetime of this agreement.

8. Commitment to Mandatory Bursary Support

The University will provide the mandatory bursary support of £338 to all eligible full-time entrants to HEFCE funded programmes. This Bursary will be paid direct by the Student Loan Company and we expect this support for new entrants will be to the value of £0.52m in 2011-12.

9. Targeted Bursary Support

The University will offer targeted bursary support of £500 per year to all students in receipt of the full maintenance grant. The use of local authority means-testing to identify eligible recipients avoids the need for the University to incur additional costs in setting up and running its own means-testing processes. This in turn ensures we are able to focus available support on the students for whom it is most needed – an estimated 31% of Northumbria's Home FT UG students and representing an investment of £0.78m per year for new entrants in 2011.

This means that students from the least advantaged sections of society will be eligible for bursary support of (given the current guidelines for the mandatory bursary) of £838 per year.

We calculate the effect of the mandatory and Northumbria bursaries for students entering in 2011 to be as follows:

Total New Home FT UG entrants per year	5000
Estimated no. on receipt of full maintenance grant	1550
% of Total	31%
Mandatory Bursary – value per student year	£338
Northumbria Bursary – value per student per year	£500
Total Bursary - per student per year	£838
Total Value of support package per year.	£1.299m

NB. Total new entrants figure relates to those students who will pay tuition fees.

10. Information on outreach activities

Information on the University's substantial outreach activities (total expenditure over £1.1m per year) is provided in our Widening Participation and Fair Access Plan. Further information is attached as Appendix B, a summary of widening participation and recruitment interventions.

11. Estimated numbers, and target groups of outreach activity

- Total activity 2009/10: 44200 individual contacts across 1935 events & activities;
- Total activity 2010/11: 48400 individual contacts across 1960 events & activities.
- Summary of activity by target group and focus:

Target Group	Recipients 2010/11	Recipients 2011/12	% Annual Growth
Pre-16	16500	18050	9.4%
Yr 12/13	22300	24450	9.6%
Teachers/Careers Advisers	500	500	0.0%
Parents	1500	1600	6.7%
Mature students	3200	3600	12.5%
Disabled students	200	200	0.0%
Total	44200	48400	9.5%

- Summary of activity by activity type – please refer to Appendix B.

12. Information about financial support

The University will continue to provide all students with the aggregate cost of tuition before they begin their programme of study. This information will be set out in:

- The University Prospectus and website;
- Information disseminated via a wide range of off-campus events in schools, colleges, community groups and at UCAS Fairs and other exhibitions;
- At on-campus events such as Open Days;
- Regular letters, emails and SMS communications, personalised to individual applicants, as part of our enquiry and admissions communications activities;
- Specialist printed information packs for applicants; and,
- Via our extensive use of social networking and online media.

13. Milestones/objectives

Figures expressed as percentages of the 'Home' FT UG student population

		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
From state schools/colleges	Northumbria	92.2	92	92	92
	<i>Benchmark</i>	91.8			
Social classes NS-SEC 4, 5, 6, & 7	Northumbria	35	34	35	35
	<i>Benchmark</i>	35			
LPNs	Northumbria	14.2	14	15	16
	<i>Benchmark</i>	10.7			
Mature (no previous HE from LPN)	Northumbria	14.8	15	16	16
	<i>Benchmark</i>	10.4			
BME	Northumbria	7	7	8	8
	<i>Benchmark</i>	-			
Disabilities	Northumbria	3.2	3	4	4
	<i>Benchmark</i>	4.9			
% not continuing and leaving HE	Northumbria	6.2	6.0	6.0	5.5
	<i>Benchmark</i>	7.6			

NB. 2008/09 – latest HESA data available using POLAR2 methodology.
LPN – low participation neighbourhoods.

14. Monitoring and Evaluation

- The University reviews its performance against HEFCE WP/Access benchmarks, at Institutional, School and Division level.
- It holds Schools accountable at Annual Development Planning meetings.
- The University's Widening Participation Plan is reviewed annually at its Student Wellbeing Committee and at Academic Board.
- The allocation of Bursaries and Scholarships will be monitored by the University Executive and at Employment and Finance Committee.
- Strategy, process and outcomes will be reviewed annually by the University Board of Governors.

15. Key Performance Indicators

- The achievement of HEFCE widening participation benchmarks for the recruitment and retention of students from low participation neighbourhoods and non-traditional backgrounds.
- The delivery of key activity volumes.
- The monitoring and evaluation of user-feedback that is integral to all activity.
- Successful delivery of admissions processes including demonstrable application of the five key principles of the Schwartz Review – 'Fair admission to Higher Education'.
- Conversion levels for applicants from all backgrounds (from enquiry – application – offer – acceptance – enrolment) that remain above sector averages.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND FAIR ACCESS PLAN

AIM

To ensure the benefits of higher education are communicated and made available to individuals, communities and via employers to the economy and by doing so to transform lives and make a full contribution to cultural, social and economic regeneration.

OBJECTIVES

- *Programmes:* To ensure our curriculum portfolio, entry points and progression rates are high quality, attractive, open and accessible to people from all sections of society.
- *Outreach:* To support schools, colleges and community groups/relevant agencies in raising the aspirations and educational achievements of all who may benefit from our programmes.
- *Recruitment to Targets & Benchmarks:* To achieve University targets and HEFCE widening participation benchmarks through the recruitment of a 'balanced intake' of individuals from all social groups.
- *Fair Access:* To ensure our recruitment and admissions processes and activities are transparent and are fully supportive of the key recommendations of the Schwartz Review, 'Fair access to higher education'.
- *Conversion:* To support applicant decision-making by providing appropriate and easily accessible information, advice and guidance (IAG), including financial information, at appropriate points in the enquiry to enrolment cycle.
- *Retention:* To improve retention rates by disseminating and embedding best practice across the University.

KEY RISKS

- The University experiences a reduction in external funding to support widening participation activity leading to fewer interventions and a reduction in activity, profile, awareness and enquiries/applications.
- Students are not attracted to Northumbria's portfolio.
- The University fails to achieve the targets defined in its Fair Access Agreement leading to a less well-balanced intake and a potential impact on its ability to set and charge undergraduate tuition fees.
- Ineffective conversion activity leading to a fall in enquiries, applications and ultimately enrolments.
- The University fails to achieve retention targets leading to a reduction in income.

CONTEXT

Widening participation (WP) is integral to Northumbria's marketing and student recruitment activity. This ensures consistency of delivery, continuity and a seamless pre-entry journey for all potential students in schools, colleges, employers and the wider community. As a consequence Northumbria can be justifiably proud of its record in widening participation, particularly the fact that it has succeeded in meeting or exceeding all of its HEFCE widening participation benchmarks in every year since their inception.

Activity is fully inclusive and opportunities to engage with Northumbria students and staff are offered to all sections of the community. Specialist interventions are, however, offered for sections of the community that have specific needs. For example:

- Young people leaving care – through links and work with the Frank Buttle Trust;
- Deaf and disabled students – Northumbria's *DIScover Conference*.

Effective targeting of WP students is achieved through a variety of routes.

- Primary (Year 6) and secondary schools;
- FE colleges;
- In partnership with Aimhigher, local authorities, other HEIs, One North East (the Regional Development Agency) and the Connexions service;
- Directly with individuals, often via community groups.

The University's formal commitment to widening participation is set out in its Access Agreement which is reviewed on a regular basis and is approved by the Office of Fair Access (OFFA). In addition this details Northumbria's full range of non-means tested bursaries and scholarships and establishes the University's commitment to a fair, equitable and transparent admissions process in line with the recommendations of the Schwartz Review – '*Fair Admissions in Higher Education*'.

The University reviews its performance against these KPIs at institutional level at the Board of Governors via Academic Board and its Learning and Teaching, Student Well-being and Admissions Committees. It holds Schools accountable for their own outcomes at Annual Development Planning meetings.

KEY PRIORITIES

During the lifetime of the plan the University will on an annual basis, through its Schools, Marketing & Recruitment Team and other support services, deliver events and focused interventions to:

- Over 120 schools and colleges;
- 38,000+ pupils in Years 6 to 13;
- 1500 parents;
- Over 3000 mature students (aged 21 and over);
- 500 teachers and other key stakeholders.

Priority audiences and interventions are as follows.

1. Year 6/KS2 (Primary Education).

Working with three other regional universities and ONE North East Northumbria will deliver STEM-focused (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) activity in primary schools

from low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs). In addition the Apprentice Students on Campus project (ASC) will see pupils and their parents attend Northumbria for 1-day workshops targeted at raising awareness and aspiration. Sports camps during school holidays provide further opportunities for children to begin to engage with the University at an early age.

2. Year 7 (Secondary education).

HE Unzipped is an interactive drama based activity offered to pupils in schools in LPNs which helps refocus their awareness and aspirations following the transition from primary school.

3. Years 8 & 9/KS3 (Secondary education).

Northumbria's award-winning '*Star Student*' game will form the basis for Year 8 interventions. The game will be played in over 100 schools per year by an anticipated 5000+ pupils. Further KS3 interventions will be achieved via the Students into Schools (SiS) and Aimhigher Student Associates (AhSA) schemes as well as attendance at school GCSE options evenings and Connexions events.

4. Years 10 & 11/KS4 (Secondary education).

ACE Days (Aiming for a College Education) will provide a series of 1-day opportunities for Year 10 students to attend the University and engage with current students in a range of activities. In addition focused Master classes will support GCSE curriculum initiatives. Activity for Year 11 students will concentrate on presentations at school parents' evenings and at Connexions events. At the same time the SiS and AhSA projects will continue to provide all year groups with positive reinforcement as to the benefits of higher education, particularly within a Northumbria context.

5. Year 12 & 13 (6th Form & FE college).

Post-16 activity becomes more recruitment focused although a strong emphasis on raising awareness and aspiration will remain. The HEFCE Summer School will give high-potential students from LPNs the opportunity to attend a 3-day residential programme while University Open Days will see over 10,000 potential students visit Northumbria in June and October each year. In addition a range of Student Shadowing opportunities allied to the continuing work in schools and colleges (including the Passport Scheme, SiS and AhSA) across the North East and beyond will ensure that enquiries and applications from students from widening participation backgrounds continue to exceed objectives. In addition we will be going out to schools and FE colleges across the region to offer information and advice to pupils in a programme of hour-long Lunchtime Road-shows, facilitated by current university undergraduates.

6. Mature students.

Extending our links with FE Colleges, including the HEFC Programme, is a vital component in our drive to increase participation from mature students. Work in FE and in the community will be supported by: IAG delivered on campus; student shadowing; a redesigned Taster Programme; a range of events on- and off-campus; and, the wide range of sporting initiatives designed to bring the wider community into Northumbria.

7. Scholarships & bursaries.

From 2011 Northumbria will offer £500 annual bursaries to all students who pay full tuition fees and who in receipt of the full maintenance grant (those from families with an annual household

income of £25,000 or less). In addition the University pays an annual mandatory bursary of £329 (£338 from 2011) to students in this group. The University will continue to offer scholarships and bursaries to support its work in widening participation, however, a full review of current policy will be initiated which will inform future support schemes and fee policy as we prepare to react to the Browne Review into HE funding and the Government's response to it.

8. Fair admissions.

As detailed in the University's Access Agreement, Northumbria maintains an unwavering commitment to Fair Admissions. Widening participation activity will continue to be supported by the delivery of an Admissions system and processes which have been shaped by and are in full agreement with the key principles outlined in the 2004 Schwartz Review, *'Fair admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice'*. The five principles are:

- Transparency;
- Selection on the basis of achievement and potential;
- Assessment that is reliable and valid;
- The minimising of barriers; and,
- Professionalism in all respects.

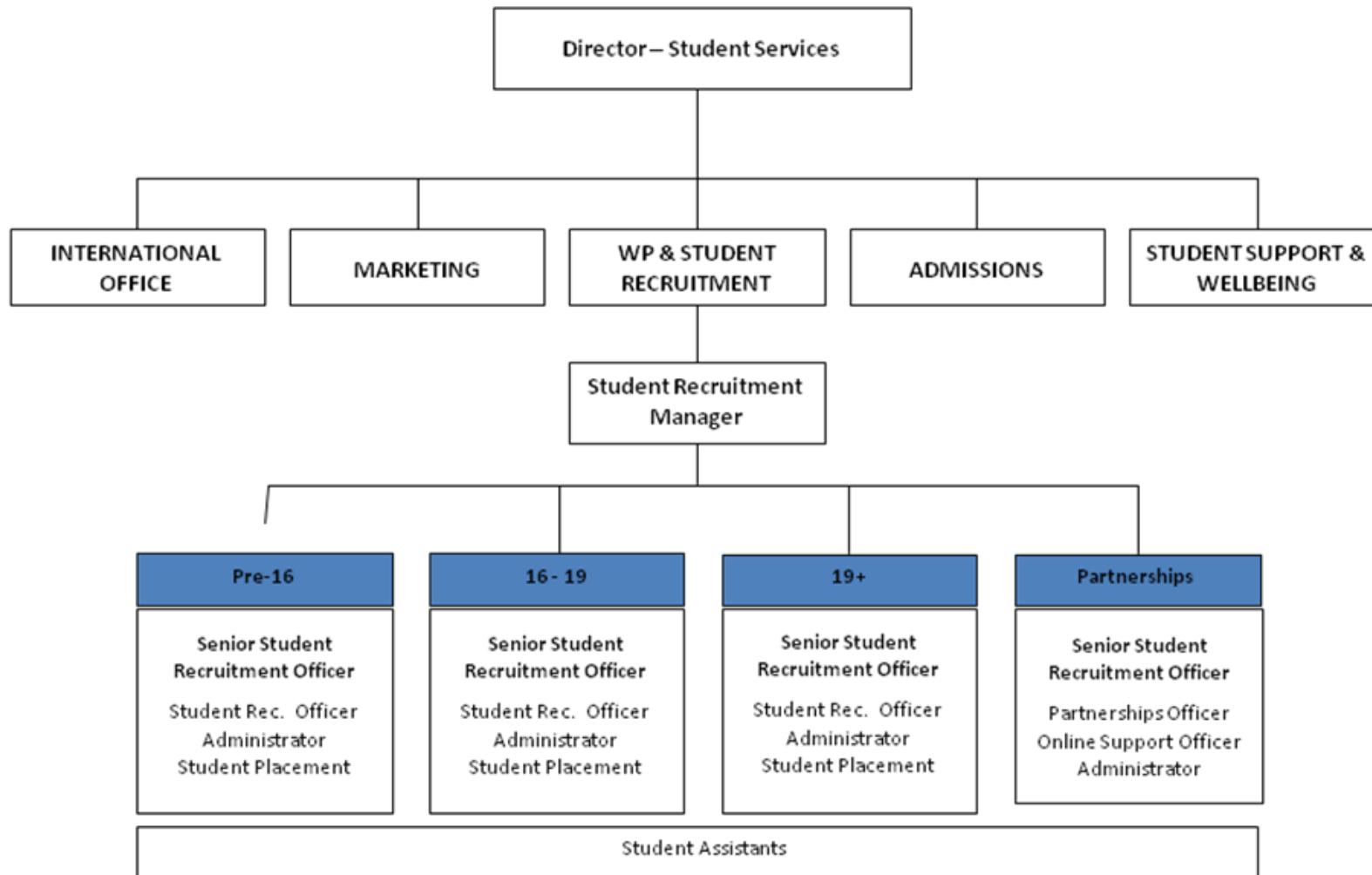
9. Targets.

The university will focus on: the delivery of a range of activity volumes; participant evaluation and feedback; and, HEFCE widening participation benchmarks for recruitment and retention. In addition, the specific milestones set out in the University's Access Agreement indicate progress to date in recruiting students from specific groups. By 2011 Northumbria aims to recruit the following proportions of its full time undergraduate students from under-represented groups:

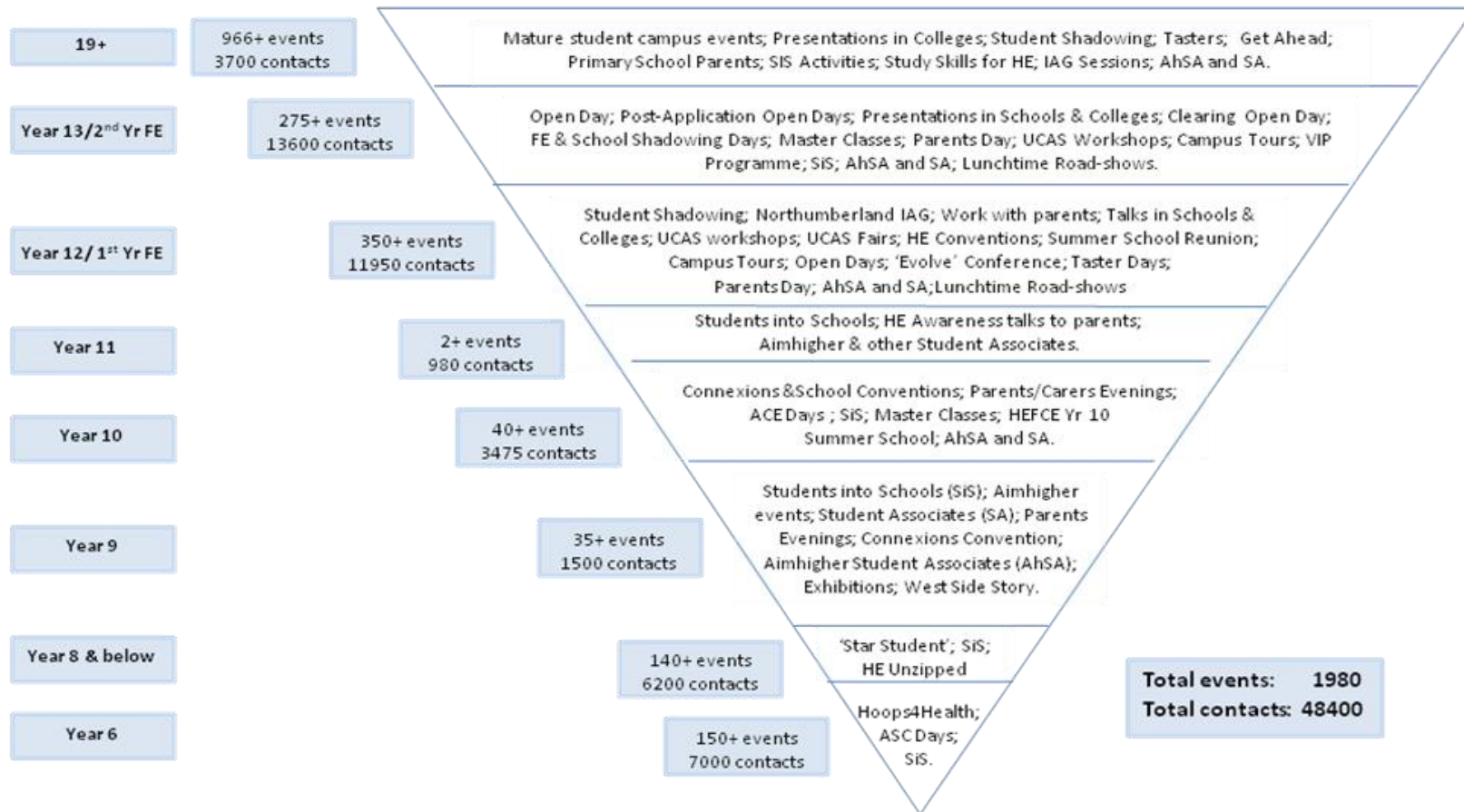
	Northumbria 2011	Sector Ave. 2007/08
Students from social classes NS-SEC 4, 5, 6 & 7	35	30
Students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs)	15	10
Mature students from LPNs with no previous HE experience	16	12
Students from minority ethnic groups	8.0	15
Students with disabilities	4.0	4.5

10. Key Performance Indicators

- The achievement of HEFCE widening participation benchmarks for the recruitment and retention of students from low participation neighbourhoods and non-traditional backgrounds.
- The delivery of key activity volumes.
- The monitoring and evaluation of user-feedback that is integral to all activity.
- Successful delivery of admissions processes including demonstrable application of the five key principles of the Schwartz Review.
- Conversion levels for applicants from all backgrounds (from enquiry – application – offer – acceptance – enrolment) that remain above sector averages.



SUMMARY OF WP/STUDENT RECRUITMENT INTERVENTIONS



NB. No. of events excludes SIS/AhSA/SA visits into schools/colleges but includes resultant contacts