



University of Sunderland

Access Agreement (for 2011/12 only)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Sunderland continues to be one of the highest performing universities in terms of attracting students from under represented groups and is committed to raising aspirations and widening participation both with local and regional students. This outreach work is designed to encourage more applications to university from under represented groups and, as a consequence, the University routinely outperforms other benchmark institutions in terms of widening participation. 26.9% of the University's young undergraduate entrants come from low participation neighbourhoods, and 98.1% of young full time entrants come from state schools. (*HEFCE Performance Indicators 2008/09 published 15th April 2010*)
- 1.2 The University's Corporate Plan exemplifies the University's long-term commitment to a high quality and inclusive higher education with a key strategic aim being the provision of "a purposeful higher education opportunity for learners from all walks of life". The University works closely with local strategic FE partners and schools to deliver aspiration building activities in hard to reach areas. Furthermore, the University has attracted over 2,000 students each to study off-campus at Higher Education Centres across the region where historically participation at the higher education level has been well below the national average.
- 1.3 Since the first University of Sunderland Access Agreement was published in 2005, participation rates in the region have risen which is testimony to the significant investment the University and its partners have made in innovative outreach initiatives. However, much work still needs to be done to raise participation rates particularly in a difficult economic climate where significant increases in fees are likely for 2012.

2. Fees for 2011/12

- 2.1 For full-time undergraduate degree courses (including Foundation Degrees delivered at strategic college partners) the University will charge £3,375 per year. This is the maximum fee and will be subject to an annual inflationary increment for the 2011 cohort of students.
- 2.2 The University in line with our employability agenda provides a significant subsidy for students who embark upon a 48 week placement during their programme of study by only charging £250 for their placement year.

3. Bursaries and other Financial Support for Students

- 3.1 A significant proportion of the University's additional fee income since higher fees were introduced in 2006/7 has been invested in providing bursaries for students. This

went far beyond the mandatory levels and included progression bursaries to help with retention and progression.

- 3.2 For 2011 the University is looking to reduce the level of fee income invested in individual bursaries and enhance even further the amount of investment in widening participation and retention activity. The University will offer the mandatory level of bursary £338 to all eligible students studying full-time undergraduate programmes.

The terms of the existing University of Sunderland Access Agreement will still apply to 2nd and 3rd year continuing students, in 2010 and 2012.

- 3.3 The decision to move the investment from the individual student to more targeted work with students who demonstrate a propensity for non-completion, and with hard to reach neighbourhoods is based on evidence provided by The Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
- i) The report from OFFA shows that disadvantaged young people have not been influenced by the size of bursary on offer when making university choices.
 - ii) Also the report findings that suggest that higher levels of fee income should be diverted to targeted outreach work with schools and colleges.

- 3.4 The new funding arrangements will result in a significant increase in fees for 2012. It is difficult to estimate the impact this will have on participation from disadvantaged families (or from middle-income earners). The Institute of Fiscal Studies have suggested that for every £1,000 increase in fees there is a negative impact of 4.4 percentage points on student participation. ("The Impact of Higher Education Finance on University Participation in the UK, January 2010).

- 3.5 In anticipation of this, during 2011 the University will need to spend additional levels of fee income on outreach and pre advice and guidance activity to ensure that students from disadvantaged groups are not deterred from applying to university. We will also further invest in our student success initiative, including enhancing student employability to ensure that student have the maximum opportunity to succeed both during their course and post graduation

- 3.6 The University is currently assessing its fees and financial support policy for students applying for entry in 2012.

4. Provision of Information to Applicants and Students

- 4.1 The University of Sunderland is committed to a transparent approach to communications relating to student fees and finance.

The key elements of the University's communication strategy are as follows:

- Internal communication with staff to ensure that an accurate and consistent message on fees and financial arrangements for students is widely disseminated and clearly understood.

- Routine communication with staff in an advisory capacity in schools, colleges and other advice and guidance networks.
- Production of clear, easy to understand guidance material (both printed and on-line) on student funding with web links to other recognised sources of information.
- Presentations and work shops through outreach and compact activities to students and advisors on fees and financial support.
- All University Open Days and Applicant events will have presentations and the opportunity for students and parents to seek advice from university financial advisers
- Fees and financial support information is presented alongside information about accommodation and cost of living expenditure

5. Widening Participation and Outreach Work

- 5.1 The University's approach is based upon development and participation in local, sub-regional and regional and national partnership working. The University has embraced the 'Aimhiger' initiative and has worked to fully implement a co-ordinated approach to aspiration building. Collaborative arrangements with FE and 6th Form Colleges exist or are being further developed to help achieve the aims of University and the Government to enable participation to be widened further.
- 5.2 The University recognises that raising levels of participation requires long-term strategic action based on changing underlying attitudes and aspirations. The partnership approach of the University includes developing long-term working relationships with regional Universities and strategic partner colleges in Sunderland, Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Bishop Auckland and Hartlepool in order to offer a range of progression pathways and educational opportunities for under represented groups.
- 5.3 Widening Participation funding has also been used to further develop and refine the university's approach to raising levels of participation amongst those living in areas across the North East of England where rates are particularly low. Using demographic and UCAS data, rates of participation at ward level have been identified and co-ordinated activity plans developed to counteract the culture of low participation.
- 5.4 The building of links extends beyond those with providers. The University works closely with the IAG Services to ensure that young people are fully informed about the range of routes into Higher Education available to them. In a period where employability is seen as a key driver, and particularly for young people from backgrounds where HE is not a common aspiration, available paid employment often appears to be the most attractive option. Rather than seeking to counter this by promoting the longer-term returns to investment in Higher Education, the University and its partner colleges seek to help students manage a combination of employment and education in a variety of patterns and models.
- 5.5 The University continues to provide a range of aspiration raising and pre-entrance activities including:

- Student Delivered activity: Student Ambassador Scheme; Student Mentoring; Student Associate Scheme
- Customer Relationship management and pre entry information advice and guidance
- Schools Support & Liaison (mock interviews, careers and parents information evenings)
- Compact Schemes (University College Northumberland UCN)
- Campus visits, open days and taster sessions
- Master Classes (including vocational subjects)
- Residential Summer Schools
- Bright Sparks' Science and Technology Club
- Sport Sunderland
- Family Fun Days
- Primary school events
- Work with young people in or leaving care

Over 28000 young people benefited from the University's Widening Participation and Outreach Activity programme (excluding UCAS fairs) in 2009/10

- 5.6 Adult returners continue to be encouraged to enter HE and the range of support mechanisms in place to assist them is an integral part of the university's commitment to widening participation. For Example: Personal Progression Plans and IAG Sessions
- 5.7 National recruitment is undertaken by the attendance at Higher Education fairs, regional road shows, the promotion of open days and individual visits, distribution of prospectuses, work with teachers and advisors, mail shots to feeder schools and the roll out of the Student Ambassador Scheme.
- 5.8 The University recognises that academic related student support services and infrastructure have a vital role to play in improving retention therefore some of the additional fees income will be used to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations from the project. This will allow the University to support all learners, especially those from non traditional backgrounds via the development of a 24/7 student gateway service, continued improvements to the Virtual Learning Environment /Managed Learning Environment (VLE/MLE), fully integrated progress files /e-portfolios and "student marketing and retention tutors" based in academic schools.
- 5.9 The University is fully committed to working in partnership at regional (North East), sub-regional (Tyne & Wear) and local (Sunderland) (East Durham etc) levels. This is seen as a major contribution to widening participation through the development of strategic approaches, for example - helping to develop the Regional Skills Strategy; the Tyne and Wear Workforce Development Plan and, at local level, the Sunderland Economic Masterplan, the Sunderland Partnership's Community Plan and 14-19 Action Plan. All of these programmes are significant sources of support for widening participation which enable the University to:-
- provide programmes for the SMEs workforce without higher level skills
 - enable those living in poorer communities to acquire employment related skills

- help people disadvantaged by ethnicity, gender or disability to gain employment related skills and
- to encourage and support within disadvantaged communities the capability to define learning needs and develop the means to meet them.

5.10 The University recognises that further progress in widening participation will not be easy to achieve. Most of the 'early wins' have been taken, and the whilst there is potential for extending participation to those in 'hard to reach' categories and living in wards with very high levels of deprivation this will require greater effort and investment over a longer time scale to achieve significant results. This can only be done in inclusive partnerships with and drawing upon a variety of funding sources.

6. Objectives and Milestones

6.1 The University of Sunderland is committed to:

- It's corporate objective to "provide a purposeful higher education opportunity for learners from all walks of life".
- Maintaining its position above HEFCE benchmark indicators relating to widening participation
- Working closely with strategic partners to develop and monitor the impact of widening participation initiatives by tracking participation from low participation neighbourhoods

6.2 In 2011 the university will establish a range of 'early warning' performance indicators in advance of HEFCE published data to monitor the impact of higher level fees on students from low participation groups. In addition the university's market research team will work with prospective students and their families to establish a financial, educational and pastoral support package that will resonate with potential students in a period of economic uncertainty.

7. Compliance

The University has a transparent annual planning and monitoring process for its Corporate Plan, Operational Plan and Supporting Strategies. This process includes targets and milestones which are kept under regular review and revised as appropriate as part of the process. The annual financial planning process forms part of this overall process. The targets we are establishing as part of our OFFA agreement will be built into our Operational Plan and Supporting Strategies and progress against those targets can be reported to OFFA as appropriate.