

UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA ACCESS AGREEMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. On 1st August 2007 the University of Cumbria came into existence, formed by the amalgamation of St Martin's College, Cumbria Institute of the Arts and the Cumbrian Campuses of the University of Central Lancashire. This new university has established a clear vision for the future:-
"Working closely with its partners and stakeholders, the University of Cumbria is committed to providing an outstanding student experience, and to bringing the transformational and opportunity-giving qualities of Higher Education to all who can benefit. Key to this is the development in all of our students of new skills and knowledge, in a supportive learning environment, which will equip them for success and fulfilment throughout their lives wherever they live and work."

2. At the centre of this vision is the University's commitment to the student experience and ensuring as many people as possible benefit from the opportunities provided by engagement with higher education. We also recognise that our learning community is enriched by the fullest possible diversity of students (in mode of study, gender, ethnicity, social and geographical background, and previous educational attainment). Additionally the University recognises that its presence in Cumbria will give it special responsibilities in growing participation within the county generally and west Cumbria specifically.

3. All of the founding institutions have a strong track record in widening participation and fair access but the University has signalled in its Business Plan an intention to build further on this foundation. In the plan the University has identified the following key aims related to widening participation in response to the national objectives set by HEFCE in its Strategic Plan 2006-2011:-

HEFCE Widening Participation Objectives	University Aims
Objective 1: To make measurable progress, while maintaining standards, to increase participation in higher education towards 50% of those aged 18 to 30 by the end of the decade, in keeping with the Government's target.	The new University expects to move from the current participation rate in Cumbria of 28% of those aged 18 to 30 to the national average after five years of operation. Whilst this will not meet the HEFCE participation rate target of 50%, this represents considerable progress.
Objective 2: To make measurable progress towards widened participation, without increasing student non-completion, while maintaining standards of excellence and recognising and building on institutional strengths and diversity.	The new University will pursue a policy of careful increase in provision, whilst securing retention rates which would put the University in the upper decile, and implement a policy of excellent student support.
Objective 3: To stimulate new sources of student demand and adjust supply accordingly	The new University will prioritise the development of HE hubs on the West Coast and in Barrow to support a comprehensive policy of increasing student demand through seamless progression.
Objective 4: To improve opportunities for all students through lifelong learning.	The new University will gradually build to a comprehensive offer of business and law courses to meet business needs which will be available locally and at a time to suit those in employment. Currently this provision does not exist.

4. In developing the Access Agreement the University has also utilised the HEFCE/HESA Performance Indicators to emphasise the importance of improving performance against the indicators for
 - FT entrants from state schools and colleges
 - FT entrants from NE-SEC classes 4-7
 - FT entrants from low participation neighbourhoods
 - FT entrants with no previous HE experience
5. This Access Agreement will generally apply to those students entering a full-time course of higher education at the University of Cumbria on or after 1st August 2008 and who are registered for a University of Cumbria award. For students entering before that date and/or entering on to a course for which the final award will be from another university the terms of the Access Agreement of the relevant founding institution will apply.

FEE LIMITS

6. The full-time undergraduate tuition fee at the University of Cumbria will be set at £3,145 for the 2008/2009 academic year. The University recognises that the marketplace in which it will be operating is a new one and intends to keep its options as flexible as possible. It will review consistently its performance in this marketplace and develop, in discussion with OFFA, its access agreement and fee policies as necessary. In that respect this Access Agreement represents a minimum position.
7. Fees will be subject to the annual inflationary increase announced by the government. The University website (www.cumbria.ac.uk) will carry further information on the programmes to which this fee level will apply as well as further details on the implementation of the Access Agreement.
8. The level of bursary offered by the University will also be subject to the annual inflationary increase announced by the government so as to ensure that support offered to eligible students will not be reduced in real terms by inflation.
9. Where students are in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG) the University will meet the difference between the level of grant and the tuition fee as adjusted for inflation. In addition, as indicated below, the University will provide further bursaries and scholarships for eligible students.
10. The University will utilise the model bursary scheme and the bursary support offered to students will be delivered through this scheme.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

11. The University intends to invest all of the additional income derived from fees directly in support of further enhancement of the learning experience of students. It has developed a Business Plan for 2007/17 which expresses clearly a vision for the future placing the student experience firmly at its centre. All additional income will be invested in the delivery of this Business Plan.

12. The University also intends to deploy a significant amount of the additional income directly on targeted bursary and scholarship support for students, on outreach work, on supporting student retention/achievement and on additional administrative support for these activities. The University believes that the realisation of the vision of the Business Plan necessitates a strong additional commitment to investment in the mission-critical areas of widening participation and access.
13. In deploying the additional funding the University will seek to minimise funding identified for administrative support so as to focus resource on student support, their environment and learning resources. It recognises that the proportions allocated to bursary/scholarship support, outreach and on course support may vary across the period of the Access Agreement. The University affirms that the allocation of funding to bursaries, scholarships and related activities are additional to previous activities and support.
14. Bursary support for targeted students is in the form of cash awards rather than fee waivers. The University may in addition award non-transferable cash credits for University services or products.
15. With regard to the level of bursaries which are available to eligible students, the University will provide some financial support to all students across four bands based broadly upon the HEMG profile.
16. The university will protect the financial terms and conditions of existing students but reserves the right to amend this Agreement and fee, bursary and scholarship levels in the future.

Bursary Levels

17. Bursaries are means-tested and targeted in line with the intentions of the Business Plan on students from lower socio-economic groups. Individual eligibility is determined through application via the local LEA as assessed by the Higher Education Bursary and Scholarship Service (HEBSS) and information about eligibility will be described more fully on the University website, through advice and guidance documentation and directly from trained liaison staff.
18. Bursary support is on a sliding scale and will result in the following level of bursary for 2008/9 (Band 1 includes the difference in funding between the fees charged and the HEMG) being made available to new and returning students as Cumbria Grants. Returning students who were formerly students of the University of Central Lancashire will receive the 'Ones to Watch Scholarships' as detailed in their Access Agreement.

HE Maintenance Grant Entitlement (HEMG) £ 2835	Cumbria Grant	Income level
Band 1	£ 1260	£ 25,000 or less
Band 2	£ 1045	25,001 to 34,450
Band 3	£ 420	34,451 to 60,005
Band 4	£ 210	60,006 or more

19. Students commencing a 4 year full-time Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) undergraduate course will be awarded a grant of £1,885 which is not means-tested. This is in recognition that the course requires one year's additional fees expenditure in comparison with a 3 year programme of study. Students will not be eligible for the Cumbria Grant in Year 1 of the course, but will receive it in Years 2, 3 and 4. They are eligible to apply for a Cumbria Scholarship.
20. In addition we hope to make available from 2007/2008 an "Achievement Grant" of £100 to every student to which the Access Agreement applies. This would be dependent on the successful completion of their current year of study at first attempt and enrolment onto the following year of study. This would be in the form of a non-transferable credit for University provided services or products.

CUMBRIA Scholarships

21. Scholarships focus on students from lower socio-economic groups, first generation higher education, low participation neighbourhoods, care leavers and disabled students. Applicants also need to demonstrate potential for achievement in the community, cultural or sporting fields. A single level of scholarship is available which provides £1000 per annum for the duration of the course with the university normally awarding a maximum of 30 new scholarships each year.
22. In addition the University may introduce additional scholarships which recognise potential and support individual achievement. Further details of the scholarships, including the numbers available in any year, the kinds of scholarships to be awarded and the application process will be available on the University website. Any scholarships awarded are in addition to any bursary support provided.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO STUDENTS

23. The University of Cumbria recognises that the changes in the fee regime could continue to have a depressive impact on the market for HE simply because of the lack of clear and high quality information available. This will be especially relevant in relation to under-represented groups with no or limited tradition of HE entry in their families or communities.
24. The University is determined that no student will be deterred from exploring and achieving entry to an appropriate Cumbrian programme because of poor information, both in terms of quality and accessibility.
25. All significant written materials designed for potential students pertaining to what are potentially complex financial arrangements will attain a "crystal mark".
26. All promotional material including reference to the financial aspects of study will clearly signpost where information on the following can be obtained as a minimum:-
 - an explanation of the mechanics of the fee regime, the grants and scholarships available and the eligibility criteria
 - answers to frequently asked questions

- access to further information or opportunities for discussing issues further.
27. While the University makes use of a variety of paper-based and electronic media to communicate its “offer” it also invests in staff training and development activities related to understanding of the new fee regime and its implications for widening participation and the University Business Plan.
 28. These activities will be delivered not only to staff with a core outreach/information role but also to staff in the university who might have a role in the provision of advice or answering queries from prospective students.
 29. In addition the University recognises that it must work imaginatively with an extensive group of external partners broadly within the “supply chain” for potential students. It already works closely with AimHigher acting as host for that organisation in Cumbria, and has developed good relationships with key FECs and, through the University for Cumbria project, a wide range of Cumbrian stakeholders. It is also committed to supporting national and regional initiatives to widening participation.
 30. The University recognises that for groups currently under-represented in HE to make an informed decision about participation requires significant and sustained communication. We will therefore wherever possible play an active and continuing role in working “on site” with such groups within identified target areas. The University regards our outreach staff as essential in providing information to potential students and will continue to invest in their quantity and quality.
 31. A particular concern for the University in communicating its message regarding the Cumbria “offer” will be to work closely with families and family/community-based organisations within targeted low participation neighbourhoods.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND OUTREACH WORK

32. The University of Cumbria is an institution founded on clear principles and developed from institutions which are proud of their record for widening participation and inclusivity.
33. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive history of past activity in widening participation but rather to identify some key aspects drawn from the merging institutions which provide the foundation on which the new Access Agreement will be implemented and which encourage confidence that the agreement will be delivered effectively.
34. Such foundations include
 - The University has a comprehensive strategic planning process involving faculties and services engaging with delivery of the key objectives of the integrated plan.
 - The founding institutions have for some time operated effective schemes (e.g. Smartpact, HEFCE Summer Schools) which provide a range of services to targeted feeder institutions and/or individual students so as to support and encourage successful applications from those who feel they may not or cannot achieve a place in higher education.

- The University will have from the outset a strong presence in Cumbria through its numerous campuses and associated sites. It is currently the largest provider of HE in Cumbria and in line with the Business Plan will build from this position to ensure that it is the provider of choice for both young people and returners to education throughout the whole county.
 - Well developed induction processes and systems of pastoral and financial student support working with applicants, students, teaching and support staff.
35. Additionally the University is active in outreach, information-giving and aspiration-raising in a variety of ways so as to maximise the opportunity for prospective students and their influencers to engage with Higher Education and reduce concerns about potential barriers. These include:
- Talks and interactive workshops delivered to groups and individuals in schools, colleges and community settings
 - Taster events to help raise aspirations and prompt engagement with higher education
 - Partnership activities as part of the AimHigher initiative across Lancashire and Cumbria
 - Written information in our prospectus, on our website and provided in a range of student-focussed publications.
 - The use of trained Student Ambassadors who provide effective 'word of mouth' communication and who also act as role models and mentors
 - Advice and guidance sessions at Open/Visit Days and Interview Days
 - Referral for specialist one-on-one guidance from the University Student Development and Advisory Service and the Student Information and Guidance Network
 - Information provided as a part of a comprehensive pack to all students who have accepted a place at the University (including clear guidance on finance).
36. In delivering this Access Agreement the University is aware that it will need to augment further its activity aimed at widening participation and supporting achievement. This will include:
- The regular review of all outreach and student support materials
 - The continued development and expansion of schemes aimed at raising aspirations and applications from under-represented student groups
 - Closer working with AimHigher and key partners across Cumbria and Lancashire
 - Increased activities aimed at parents as key influencers in the decision to enter HE
 - Increased activities in local communities in non-traditional locations (e.g. community and leisure centres, rural events, WEA).
 - Increased support for vulnerable students to both improve retention and achievement
 - Increased support for students in financial planning and debt management
 - Increased investment in learning support and the student learning environment and facilities

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, MILESTONES AND MONITORING

37. The key indicators of success against the Access Agreement will be further refined but will focus on quantified improvement in both process measures such as:
- application rates from target groups
 - attendance at outreach events related to target groups
 - attendance at taster days
- and outcome measures such as
- the PIs for social class entry
 - the PIs for LPN entry
 - retention of target groups
 - achievement of target groups
38. Internal monitoring of achievement against milestones set will be provided through:
- regular reports to the Marketing, Recruitment and Communication (MRC) Senior Management Team by our Strategic Planning and Policy Support Service (SPPS)
 - an annual report to Academic Board
 - an annual report to Governing Body
39. Operational co-ordination of achievement against Access Agreement is the responsibility of the MRC Service supported by the SPPS Service. The lead senior manager is the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Development and External Affairs)