

University of Essex

Access Agreement

Revised August 2008

1. Context

The University of Essex is academically a strong institution, with an excellent reputation for both teaching and research. It also has a long-term commitment to widening participation and access. Since its establishment in 1964, the University has encouraged applicants from non-traditional routes, particularly mature students and applicants with disabilities.

In recent years the University has established strategic partnerships to increase student access to its provision in the region. It has well-developed collaborative arrangements with a number of regional higher education institutions and colleges and sees partnership and collaboration as central to its mission. The partnership with South East Essex College (SEEC) has resulted in approx. 630 students studying for a range of high quality, vocational degrees in Southend, mainly from the locality and from non-traditional backgrounds. From 2006 the University of Essex has also validated higher education provision at Colchester Institute. All undergraduate degree schemes at SEEC and Colchester Institute are validated by the University of Essex and therefore SEEC and Colchester Institute, as partner institutions, are covered by this Agreement. Details of the Bursary schemes of SEEC and Colchester Institute are appended to this Access Agreement. The partnership with Writtle College near Chelmsford is not covered by this Access Agreement, as Writtle receives degree programme funding directly from HEFCE.

Our various partnerships have been designed to expand the range of provision across the region, and have led to increased collaboration in course development and design in order to address two of the key barriers to participation – geographical isolation and the perception of the increasing cost of participation in higher education.

The University is also engaged in partnership with the University of East Anglia and a range of higher education providers in Suffolk and Norfolk to enhance higher education provision in the region. This initiative, titled University Campus Suffolk (UCS) has substantial potential to widen access and opportunity within the East of England. Details of the provision, in addition to information on funding support and tuition fee levels, are appended to this Access Agreement.

The University also has a campus in Loughton which provides an extensive range of acting and theatre-based courses at the East 15 Acting School. E15 is a department of the University of Essex and therefore all courses are covered by the tuition fee and bursary arrangements that exist for the University of Essex.

This revised Access Agreement takes into account the changes in government maintenance support grants from 2009 entry. The University intends to produce a further agreement to cover the period from October 2010 in the light of its experience of applications post 2006.

2. Intended fee level

The University of Essex tuition fee for 2009 entry will be £3,225 per annum for all full-time undergraduate degree courses, including courses of study that lead to the award of the Higher Education Certificate or a Foundation degree.

All full-time undergraduate degree courses available at UCS will also have tuition fees of £3,225 per annum, in recognition of the high quality of the joint University of East Anglia and University of Essex awards offered.

The University will charge the standard fee, £1,285 in 2009, for the preliminary year (Year 0) of a four-year scheme which includes a foundation year.

3. Bursary provision

Note that all bursaries are offered as cash bursaries for course related costs.

3.1 Bursary provision at the University of Essex (Colchester, Loughton and Southend campuses)

The University wishes to ensure that no student is deterred from applying to Essex on the grounds of financial hardship. It is therefore planning to spend 27% of its additional variable tuition fee on student financial support and outreach activities, of which 25% will be on bursaries.

The University of Essex intends to offer bursary support that enhances the levels of financial assistance available from Government support. The level of residual household incomes that are used to determine eligibility for support mirror those set by the Government. The figures below are for 2009 entry, and are amended each year in line with the residual household income thresholds that are used to determine state support.

- **For students with residual household incomes below £25,000 per annum**

The University will provide a £319 bursary in addition to the Government Higher Education Maintenance Grant of £2,906 a year, giving a combined total of £3,225.

- **For students whose residual household incomes are between £25,000 and £34,460 per annum**

The University will provide a bursary to ensure combined University and Government support of £3,225 each year.

- **For students whose residual household incomes are between £34,460 and £60,032 per annum**

The University will provide a bursary, tapering off on a sliding scale, so that students at the upper household income point will receive no additional state or institutional support above the basic Student Loan.

- **For students engaged on the preliminary year (Year 0) of a four-year degree scheme that involves a foundation year**

The University will offer a fee waiver, charging only the standard fee. These students will not qualify for any other University of Essex Bursary funding during the preliminary year.

Examples of the scheme are as follows:

An applicant with a residual household income of £20,000 a year will receive £319 from the University bursary and £2,906 from the Government, giving a total of £3,225 a year.

An applicant with a residual household income of £25,000 a year will receive £319 from the University bursary and £2,906 from the Government, giving a total of £3,225 a year.

An applicant with a residual household income of £30,000 a year will receive £1,172 from the University bursary and £2,053 from the Government, giving a total of £3,225 a year.

An applicant with a residual household income of £40,000 a year will receive £1,525 from the University bursary and £1,023 from the Government, giving a total of £2,548 a year.

An applicant with a residual household income of £50,000 a year will receive £789 from the University bursary and £537 from the Government, giving a total of £1,326 a year.

An applicant with a residual household income of £59,000 a year will receive £126 from the University bursary and £100 from the Government, giving a total of £226 a year.

An applicant with a residual household income of £60,000 a year will receive £53 from the University bursary and £51 from the Government, giving a total of £104 a year.

For all household income categories, the University of Essex Bursary will be in addition to the assistance available from the Student Loan.

Note that all of these residual household incomes for calculating Bursary thresholds are based on current funding models that exist as provided by the Government, and should there be a substantial change in policy, these residual household income levels will be altered to reflect the changes.

3.2 Bursary provision at South East Essex College

South East Essex College (SEEC) intends to offer a bursary scheme that recognises the particular demographic profile of its students, who are predominately from the local area. Bursary schemes funded by additional income from variable fees will operate for the students on degree schemes offered at SEEC.

3.3 Bursary provision at Colchester Institute

Colchester Institute intends to offer bursary support that reflects the nature of its student body. Support will be targeted at those from low-income households, and for students who opt to pursue vocationally orientated Foundation degrees.

3.4 Bursary provision at UCS

UCS will offer bursary schemes that provide generous payments to less well off students towards the costs associated with their course of study. For details, see attached UCS Access Agreement.

4. Outreach activities

The University of Essex intends to focus widening participation activities in four areas:

- Outreach during the pre-application phase
- Support to applicants with disabilities
- Support to non-traditional applicants, including mature applicants
- Employment skills and careers guidance

4.1 Pre-application support

Since 1998, the University has implemented an integrated approach to widening participation which focuses on student recruitment and schools/colleges liaison. In addition, Aimhigher activities have been integrated ensuring effective operation and co-ordination of the range of outreach activities.

School and College visits (post-16)

An extensive programme provides guidance and advice on applications to higher education, student finance, welfare provision, and raising awareness of higher education opportunities to an audience of potential applicants and/or their parents. The information and guidance is not specific to Essex, but aimed to give an unbiased and comprehensive indication of opportunities and to break down barriers to higher education progression.

Pre-16 awareness-raising and guidance activities

The University has also built up a wide range of activities aimed at encouraging participation and raising awareness amongst pre-16 year old students and their parents from groups that are traditionally under represented in higher education. As well as working in schools, the University hosts a range of projects and events, including residential summer schools, working with a number of partners including Aimhigher, other higher education institutions, schools, colleges and other education organisations.

The University recognises the importance of accurate and targeted data and market intelligence in providing information on applicant behaviour. It collects applicant data, including information from annual samples of applicants who decline offers to study at Essex, in order to determine the factors influencing applicant choices and to improve provision and facilities for students. Focus groups are used to determine the validity and usefulness of applicant information and to assess strengths and weaknesses in particular subject provision. The University also conducts regular student satisfaction surveys.

Additional activity

The University has used additional tuition fee income to establish two posts in order to develop its widening participation activities.

An Education Outreach Officer post is in place to develop additional outreach activities including visits, finance activities and open day events. Outreach visits are aimed at schools and colleges where participation in higher education is not the norm and focus on gaps in guidance among local (Essex/Suffolk/East London) post-16 providers. The post-holder also works with staff involved in student guidance and local Access providers in Essex and Suffolk to develop a programme of higher education awareness-raising activities aimed at mature students.

A Publications and Market Research Officer post enables the University to collect and analyse data about applicant behaviour and concerns. The data is disseminated amongst partner colleges, and used to inform regional bodies on higher education progression opportunities and barriers. The analysis of applicant behaviour also supports the provision of additional targeted materials to explain the current funding system to applicants and their parents and advisors. The post-holder also conducts research into the needs of mature applicants and local applicants to assist in the design of academic and non-academic support and information relating to the pre and post-application processes.

4.2 Supporting applicants with disabilities

The University has a strong record of recruiting students with disabilities and of actively developing and promoting higher education opportunities for students with disabilities. The University works to ensure that students are given appropriate guidance on the support available to help them reach their full potential whilst at Essex or at other higher education institutions.

Additional activity

The University intends to appoint additional administrative support to the Disability Team in the Student Support Office. This will enable student support needs to be identified and actioned earlier in the application cycle, and also provide on-going support for existing applicants with disabilities to help their progression and retention.

In addition the University will enhance pre-entry disability guidance and support for students across Essex and Suffolk by expanding the work of the Access Centre, which conducts assessments prior to commencement of a degree (either at Essex or another higher education institution) for applicants across the Eastern region. The post-holder will assist with the administration of assessment appointments and production of the assessment reports.

A new full-time post of Office Administrator was appointed in September 2006, with responsibility for supporting disability related processes in Student Support. A new full-time Senior Adviser (Disability Needs Assessment) was appointed in January 2006. The number of assessments undertaken during 2005-2006 exceeded the target for 2007, and it is expected that the number of assessments will increase further in future years.

4.3 Supporting non-traditional applicants

The University operates a centralised Student Support service, which covers a wide range of areas, including guidance for international students, student counselling, support for applicants with disabilities and mental health needs, financial planning and support and welfare guidance.

Additional activity

Further targeted support will be provided in the form of additional information (including web-based material) and guidance on money management. The guidance will be informed by research on applicant needs. In addition the University will expand its existing range of induction courses to provide additional study skills workshops aimed at applicants with non-traditional qualifications to ensure that they are appropriately equipped to undertake their degree scheme.

4.4 Employment skills and careers guidance

The University has invested in the provision of graduate careers guidance and, through the University JobShop, worked to ensure job opportunities for those who need to support their studies financially with work that fits around their university commitments. The JobShop, now in its tenth year, has found many students part-time employment to support their studies. The opportunity for students to undertake paid employment whilst studying is a crucial factor in retention and enables students, who are from backgrounds where there is limited financial support available from their family, to access alternative means of meeting their living costs.

Additional activity

The University will appoint two additional administrators in the Careers Service and JobShop to support students from low-participation backgrounds. One of the two additional posts will have special responsibility for students with no family history of higher education participation. This will enable the more effective targeting of skills workshops and guidance interviews and will improve student tracking. The additional posts will also allow the JobShop to work with a greater range and diversity of local employers to increase the quantity and quality of part-time vacancies.

This additional provision will support the 11% of the existing 18-21 year old undergraduate student body from low-participation neighbourhoods, as well as the 12% of the over 21 year old student body from similar backgrounds.

The University has established a student work placement scheme called 'Frontrunners'. The scheme is designed to encourage students who need additional income to fund their studies to work on campus in a variety of roles linked to a Personal Development Plan. Participating students develop high-level workplace skills which will enhance their eventual

employability. Additionally, working on campus is thought to be less disruptive to their studies and will help to retain students who might otherwise not complete their course of studies because of financial pressures. A variety of placements are available based in academic departments, in administrative sections and in the Students' Union.

5. Provision of information to students

The University's undergraduate prospectus is printed in mid-February in time for the first of the higher education fairs that begin in March. It includes details on fees, an outline of the bursary scheme and a website address and telephone number to provide more detailed information.

The University also publicises its fees and bursary provision through:

- i. A suite of promotional literature (aimed at applicants, parents, and guidance advisers) both in printed and web-based formats, which explain fees, government support for maintenance and the University bursaries. The information is disseminated at fairs, the pre-applicant open days and at school and college talks and visits.
- ii. A fees and funding website, referenced in the printed prospectus and promotional literature provides full details of the fees and bursary provision.
www.essex.ac.uk/studentfinance
- iii. Provision of information to the UCAS web-based course search facility on fees and funding.

6. Milestones

The University of Essex intends to demonstrate its progress towards meeting its widening participation targets through the use of the annual HEFCE/HESA benchmarks. Through its bursary and outreach activities, the University intends to meet, and where possible exceed, benchmark performance figures.

The most recently published benchmark figures indicate that the University meets or exceeds its benchmark figures in most cases:

Category	Actual proportion at Essex	Benchmark
Under 21 years on first degree from state schools (06/07)	95%	89%
Under 21 years on first degree from social classes 4, 5, 6 and 7 (06/07)	32%	31%
Under 21 years on first degree from low participation neighbourhoods (06/07)	14%	10%
Mature students on first degree from low participation neighbourhoods (06/07)	21%	14%
Under 21 years on first degree from low participation neighbourhoods, who fail to progress to second year of course (05/06)	7%	9%
Mature students on first degree with no prior HE experience, who fail to progress to second year of course (05/06)	16%	15%

Specific milestones relating to the outreach activities detailed in Section 4 are provided below:

Activity	Timescale	Target group
Pre-application support		
An additional five outreach visits will be conducted each year to schools and colleges	Delivered annually	Local students in year 12 from low participation neighbourhoods
The provision of at least ten additional school or college campus visits each year for students and their families	Delivered annually	Local students in years 9-12 and their families from low participation neighbourhoods
Development of subject taster days allowing students to spend a day experiencing studying specific subjects at higher education level	Delivered annually	Local students in years 9-12 and their families from low participation neighbourhoods
Develop three interactive finance activities to be used as a resource in schools and colleges and at HE awareness days	Delivered December 2006 Updated annually	Years 7-13
Introduction of an HE Open Day for students providing introductions to academic subjects, as well as presentations on funding, student life and input from other regional HE providers	Delivered annually	Year 12 local schools
Develop programme of visits and a residential summer school in conjunction with Essex and Suffolk Access providers	Delivered annually	Mature applicants from the local area
Attendance at an additional five school-based guidance events each year	Delivered annually	Year 7-11 students from local schools
Analysis of data relating to applicant behaviour and development of two additional targeted publications about funding and HE participation	Delivered annually	All applicants
Support for applicants with disabilities		
Expansion of the work of the Access Centre to provide additional assessments of need for disabled applicants and students	Delivered annually	70 applicants with disabilities from across the Eastern region
Development of a suite of targeted information packs (print and web-based formats) for applicants with specific disability needs (e.g. dyslexia) prior to and after confirmation of results in August	Delivered December 2006 Reviewed annually	Applicants with disabilities
Development of targeted induction programmes for students with disabilities (e.g. dyslexia workshops, campus tours for students with mobility disabilities)	Delivered October 2007 Updated annually	Students with disabilities
Support for non-traditional applicants		
Additional information and support on money management, including web-based material	Delivered October	Non-traditional applicants,

	2007 Updated annually	particularly students at risk of debt
Additional study skills workshops aimed at applicants with non-traditional qualifications	Delivered annually	Non-traditional applicants
Residential summer school	Delivered annually	Local students studying level 3 vocational qualifications
Employment skills and careers guidance		
Development of an additional programme of workshops to enhance employment skills, provide guidance on CVs and interview skills, and enhance student self-esteem and confidence	Delivered annually	Students from low-participation neighbourhoods and mature students
Offer a differentiated service of one-to-one advice and guidance interviews from an early stage for students identified through improved tracking systems as needing targeted assistance	Delivered annually	Students from low-participation neighbourhoods and mature students
Increase resources devoted to the marketing of the JobShop to local employers, and develop a database on JobShop destinations, to identify trends in local part-time employment opportunities	Delivered October 2007 Reviewed annually	Students from low-participation neighbourhoods and mature students

7. Monitoring

Annual monitoring will be undertaken through the Annual Monitoring Statement to HEFCE. The University's Recruitment and Widening Participation Group will receive regular reports on the activities outlined in the Access Agreement, along with details of progress against HEFCE performance indicators and milestones and will provide institutional oversight of widening participation work. In addition, updates on specific aspects of the Agreement will be given at the termly meetings of the Group.

Colchester Institute

Amended November 2007

Bursary Provision at Colchester Institute

Colchester Institute intends to offer Bursary support that reflects the nature of its student body. Support will be targeted at those from low-income households, and for students who opt to pursue vocationally orientated Foundation degrees.

Colchester Institute Bursary

Colchester Institute will provide a means tested Bursary equivalent to that offered for the University of Essex Bursary described in section 3.1.

Foundation Degree Progression Bursary

In addition there will be a non-means tested Foundation Degree Bursary which will be paid at the end of the first term. This would be provided in three instalments:

- The first instalment will be paid at the end of the first term after the census return.
- The second instalment will be paid at the end of the second year of study for students who successfully graduate.
- A final instalment to graduates from the Foundation degree who progress to the third (top-up) year of the honours degree programme. This would be paid at the end of the first term after the census return.

Bursary Provision at South East Essex College

(November 2007, to take effect from September 2008 entry)

South East Essex College intends to offer a bursary scheme that recognises the particular demographic profile of its students, who are predominately from the south Essex area. In addition our bursary schemes are intended to promote internal progression from the College further education provision and to emphasise the importance that the College places on its foundation degree provision.

The Low Income Bursary

This will consist of £400 to each student whose household income is assessed to be less than £25,000. This bursary will decrease on a sliding scale for household incomes between £25,001 and £45,000. It is estimated that 40% of students will qualify for the full bursary and a further 60% of students will receive a partial bursary. The combined cost of these two bursaries is estimated at 25% of the additional revenue generated by the variable fee income.

The FE College Bursary

This will take the form of a non-means tested bursary of £300 for any student who registers for a degree programme at the College within one year of completion of their studies at a state school or further education college. The bursary will be payable as applicable for year one, year two and year three of the programme. It is estimated that more than 50% of students will benefit from this bursary.

The Foundation Degree Bursary

This will take the form of a non-means tested bursary of £400 for any student who registers for a foundation degree programme at the College. The bursary will be payable for both year one and year two of the foundation degree and to those students who progress to the third (top up) year of the honours degree programme.

These bursaries will be subject to the annual inflationary increases announced by the Government (assuming the variable fee also increases in line with the annual inflation rate). Means tested thresholds will also increase in line with any Government announcements.

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