

University of Essex

Access Agreement

Revised November 2007

1. Context

The University of Essex is academically a strong institution, with an excellent reputation for both teaching (ranked 7th nationally in the THES May 2003) and research (ranked 10th nationally in the THES December 2001). It also has a long-term commitment to widening participation and access (listed in 'The Access Elite', *THES*, January 2002). Since its establishment in 1964, the University has encouraged applicants from non-traditional routes, particularly mature students (currently 18.2% of full-time undergraduate numbers) and applicants with disabilities. The University's undergraduate degree schemes are all for full-time students and encompass about 50% of the total range of subjects that are available nationally for undergraduate applicants.

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 HEIs 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 Southend and Colchester Institute are validated by the University of Essex as part of the partnership agreement, 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, because 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 HE.

The University is also extending and deepening its involvement in Southend through the direct delivery of a range of new, market-driven programmes and is constructing a new HE campus, for the University of Essex Southend.

The University is currently 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 (east London/Essex border) 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 2008 entry. The University will construct a further agreement to cover the period from October 2009 in the light of its experience of applications post-2006.

2. Intended Fee Level

The University of Essex intends to set variable tuition fees at £3,145 per annum for all full-time undergraduate degree schemes for 2008, including courses of study that lead to the award of the Higher Education Certificate or a Foundation degree. This also applies to degrees taught by Colchester Institute and validated by the University.

The full-time degree courses available at University Campus Suffolk will also set tuition fees at £3,140 per annum, in recognition of the calibre of provision jointly validated by the University of East Anglia and University of Essex.

It is intended to charge the standard fee (£1,225 in 2007, rising with inflation) for the preliminary year (Year 0) of a four-year scheme which includes a foundation year. This covers degree schemes available at the Colchester campus of the University of Essex only.

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.

3.1.1 University of Essex Bursary

The University of Essex intends to offer bursary support that enhances existing 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 reflect the 2008 entry position, 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 annum¹**

The University will provide a £310 bursary for course related costs. In making this commitment we are assuming that Government support for maintenance will provide a minimum of £2,835 a year to students whose annual residual household incomes before tax are under £25,000. Together with the bursary, this will provide in total £3,145 in maintenance support.

- **For students whose residual household incomes are between £25,000 and £32,690 per annum**

The University will provide a bursary for course related costs to ensure that all UK students will receive maintenance support equivalent to £3,145 each year when the bursary is combined with Government support for maintenance.

¹ before tax at current (2007) rates

- **For students whose residual household incomes are between £32,690 and £60,000 per annum**

The University will provide a bursary for course related costs which will taper off on a sliding scale, such 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. This will assist an estimated 50 students per year (3% of the full-time undergraduate intake).

Examples of the scheme are as follows:

An applicant with a residual household income of £20,000 a year will receive £310 from the University bursary and £2,835 from the Government, giving a total of £3,145 a year

An applicant with a residual household income of £25,000 a year will receive £310 from the University bursary and £2,835 from the Government, giving a total of £3,145 a year

An applicant with a residual household income of £30,000 a year will receive £1,143 from the University bursary and £2,002 from the Government, giving a total of £3,145 a year

An applicant with a residual household income of £40,000 a year will receive £1,166 from the University bursary and £997 from the Government, giving a total of £2,163 a year

An applicant with a residual household income of £50,000 a year will receive £583 from the University bursary and £524 from the Government, giving a total of £1,107 a year

An applicant with a residual household income of £59,000 a year will receive £58 from the University bursary and £98 from the Government, giving a total of £156 a year

An applicant with a residual household income of £60,000 a year will receive £0 from the University bursary and £50 from the Government, giving a total of £50 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.

These bursary arrangements cover courses at the Colchester, Loughton (East 15) and Southend campuses

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 a bursary scheme which provides generous payments to students from low-income households to support study costs. Amounts will vary dependent on the level of state support received.

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

4.1.1 Current Position

Under the management of the Head of Undergraduate Admissions and Widening Participation, the University has since 1998 implemented an integrated approach to widening participation which focuses on student recruitment and schools/colleges liaison. In addition P4P/Aim Higher activities have been integrated into the work of this Office ensuring effective operation and co-ordination of the range of outreach activities.

School and College Visits (post-16) - A programme of visits to post-16 institutions is in place, providing guidance and advice on applications to higher education, student finance, welfare provision, and raising awareness of HE opportunities to an audience of potential applicants and/or their parents. In all instances the information and guidance is not specific to Essex, but aimed to give an unbiased and comprehensive indication of HE opportunities and to break down barriers to HE progression. Visits are made in Essex, Southend, Thurrock, Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Suffolk (78 visits during 2003-2004, representing 50% of institutions in these areas), with further visits to another 42 post-16 institutions elsewhere in England, the majority of which are schools and colleges in low participation neighbourhoods. This represents a significant increase in widening participation activity since 1994-1995 when schools liaison outreach was first organised in its current form at Essex and when 39 visits were made to local schools and colleges and 31 visits to institutions elsewhere in England.

Pre-16 awareness-raising and guidance activities in schools - The University has also built up a range of activities aimed at encouraging participation and raising awareness amongst pre-16 year old students and their parents from low participation neighbourhoods. During 2003-2004 the University ran a mentoring scheme in three local schools, providing ten mentors for 33 pupils identified by staff in the schools as being likely to benefit from having positive role models. During the 2004-05 academic year this was increased to support 63 pupils with 21 mentors, all of whom have been trained and CRB-checked. In addition the University has established a pilot scheme with a local specialist Sports College to provide a sports mentor to assist with coaching activities.

During 2003-2004 the University sent staff and student ambassadors to 21 guidance evenings aimed at students in years 7-11, and participated in two ACE day activities for schools in low participation neighbourhoods in Colchester.

Pre-16 awareness and guidance activities on campus - In conjunction with a range of other HE and FE providers in the region, the University has co-ordinated five *Young People into HE* programmes aimed at Year 8 and 9 pupils in Colchester, Tendring, Braintree, Southend and Canvey Island. In all cases this has involved three day programmes that include visits and activities in FE and HE institutions, and an opportunity to have information on HE participation disseminated to parents. These programmes are supplemented by follow-up activities arranged for participants from previous years. A further programme to cover schools in Ipswich is under development for 2004-2005. The University has also arranged a two day 'On Campus' programme for 68 year 12 students from schools in Colchester and Tendring in 2003-2004. During 2005 it is intended to offer it again to the same schools, as well as to run an additional course in March 2005 for schools in the Basildon Education Action Zone.

In addition the University has hosted 22 campus visits for students in years 9-12 from schools that have low participation in HE from across Essex, Suffolk and East London.

Residential summer schools - Essex has also offered a range of residential summer schools supported by the European Social Fund and aimed at raising awareness and aspirations for applicants from low-participation neighbourhoods. In 2003-2004 these comprised a Year 10 three day Drama school, for 54 students from across Essex and Southend, a Year 11 week long event on generic HE awareness for 34 students from the Eastern and London regions, and a Year 12 three day Sports Science school for 17 students from across Essex.

In all cases, except for the 'On Campus' activities, funding and resources have been provided through P4P and Aim Higher.

The University recognises the importance of accurate and targeted data and market intelligence in providing information on applicant behaviour. It has collected applicant data, including information from an annual sample of 2,500 applicants who declined offers to study at Essex, in order to determine the factors influencing applicant choices and to improve provision and facilities for students. The University conducts focus groups to determine the validity and usefulness of its applicant information (prospectus, website) and uses applicant groups to assess the strengths and weaknesses in particular subject provision. The University also conducts regular student satisfaction surveys.

4.1.2 Future Activity

The University has used additional tuition fee income to establish two additional posts (from 2006) in order to develop its widening participation activities. The posts and duties are:

A Widening Participation Officer, appointed for the duration of the Access Agreement, to enable the development of additional outreach activities including visits, mentoring, finance activities and open day events. The post-holder conducts additional outreach visits each year to schools and colleges where participation in HE is not the norm, in the first instance focusing on any gaps in HE guidance among local (Essex/Suffolk/East London) post-16 providers. In addition, the post-holder works with staff involved in student guidance and provides training at INSET events for teachers and Connexions staff on the implications and scope of the new funding regime. The post-holder also works with local Access Certificate providers in Essex and Suffolk to develop a programme of HE awareness-raising activities aimed at mature students. Further details are provided under Milestones.

A Publications and Market Research Officer, appointed for two years in the first instance, who collects and analyses data about applicant behaviour and concerns. The data will be disseminated amongst partner colleges, as well as used to inform regional bodies on HE progression opportunities and barriers. The analysis of applicant behaviour will also support the provision of additional targeted materials to explain to applicants and their parents and advisors the impact of the changes in student funding, as well as ensuring materials explaining University policy are fit for purpose.

The post-holder 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

4.2.1 Current Position

The University has a strong record of recruiting students with disabilities. The proportion of the University's home undergraduate population who have disclosed a disability to the University has increased from 7.6% in 2002-2003 (national average 6.4%) to 9.8% in 2003-2004 (national average 6.9%) to 9.1% in 2004-2005. The University is actively developing and promoting HE opportunities for students with disabilities, either for schemes available at Essex or its partners, or at HE institutions outside the county. It is also working to ensure that more students are given appropriate guidance on the support available to help them reach their full potential whilst in HE.

4.2.2 Future Activity

The University intends to appoint additional administrative support (clerical grade 3 post) 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 HE institution) for applicants across the Eastern region. The post-holder will assist the Disability Assessor with administration of assessment appointments and production of the assessment reports. Currently the Access Centre completes approximately 35 assessments a year – by July 2007 it is anticipated that they will be able to double this number.

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 above for 2007, and it is expected that the number of assessments may be able to increase further in future years.

4.3 Supporting Non-traditional Applicants

4.3.1 Current Position

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.

4.3.2 Future 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 conducted by the Publications and Market Research Officer 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

4.4.1 Current Position

The University has invested in the provision of graduate careers guidance and, through the University Job Shop, 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 ninth year, has found many students part-time employment to support their studies. From 1999 to 2005 the JobShop advertised 11,000 vacancies and placed 3,600 students. 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.

June 2007 the University's Senior Management committed a total of £141,000 to a pilot student employment scheme funded by the underspend on bursary allocation in the year 2006 - 2007. This 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. The scheme will enable participating students to develop 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. The scheme will benefit students from WP backgrounds who are already studying here and will, if promoted effectively, encourage students from WP backgrounds to participate in HE in future years.

A variety of students jobs are available now in the Student Union, Administrative Sections and some academic departments. The pilot scheme will be expanded in the coming years to provide more opportunities for students to gain employability skills on campus, funded from tuition fee income.

4.4.2 Future Activity

From 2006 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 HE 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. Further details are given under Milestones.

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.

5. Provision of Information to Students

The University's undergraduate prospectus is printed in mid-February in time for the first of the HE conventions commencing in March. It includes details to indicate the level of fees, an outline of the bursary scheme and a website address and telephone number to provide more detailed information.

From 2006 entry the University intends to publicise its fees and bursary provision in the following additional ways:

- i. A suite of promotional literature (aimed at applicants, parents, and guidance advisers) both in printed and web-based formats, which explain variable fees, government support for maintenance and the University bursaries. The information will be disseminated at HE conventions, INSET training events, 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/newfundingarrangements)
- 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, the benchmark performance figures.

The most recently published (2001-2002) benchmark figures from HEFCE indicate that the University meets or exceeds its benchmark figures in most cases.

Category	Actual proportion at Essex	Benchmark proportion adjusted for geographical location
Under 21 years on first degree from state schools	93%	86%
Under 21 years on first degree from social classes III, IV and V	25%	25%
Under 21 years on first degree from low participation neighbourhoods	13%	10%
Mature students on first degree from low	12%	14%

participation neighbourhoods		
Under 21 years on first degree from low participation neighbourhoods, who fail to progress to second year of course	9%	10%
Mature students on first degree with no prior HE experience, who fail to progress to second year of course	17%	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
Provision of training at a minimum of three INSET events for teachers and Connexions staff on the implications and scope of the new funding regime	Delivered annually	Guidance staff who counsel local students 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 the mentoring scheme to implement a 'student shadowing event' allowing students to spend a day in the company of an undergraduate at the campus.	Delivered annually	Year 9 students from local schools in low participation neighbourhoods
Develop, in conjunction with Student Support, three interactive finance activities to be used as a resource by guidance advisors in schools and colleges and at HE awareness days.	Delivered December 2006 Updated annually	Years 7-9, years 10-11 and years 12-13 – any school or college nationally.
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 and the Connexions service.	Delivered annually	Years 10 and 11 from local schools

Develop programme of visits in conjunction with Essex and Suffolk Access Certificate providers to talk to students about HE options.	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 2007 updated annually	Non-traditional applicants, particularly students at risk of debt.
Additional study skills workshops aimed at applicants with non-traditional qualifications	Delivered annually	“
Employment Skills and Careers Guidance		
Development of an additional programme of workshops to enhance employment skills (on, for example, negotiation, team-working, presentation, assertiveness), 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	“
Increase resources devoted to the marketing of the JobShop to local employers (particularly small and medium-sized businesses), and develop a database on JobShop destinations, to identify trends in local part-time employment opportunities.	Delivered October 2007 Reviewed annually	“

7. Monitoring

Annual monitoring will be undertaken through the Annual Monitoring Statement to HEFCE, which is signed off by the Vice-Chancellor. 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.