

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2006/07 to 2010/11

Information about the University relevant to this agreement

1. The University's current home/EU undergraduate population (as at 1 December 2006) is 6753. 52 per cent of this population is female, 11 per cent is mature (over 21), and 15 per cent comes from an ethnic background (predominantly of Asian origin).
2. In terms of HESA Performance Indicators relevant to this agreement, Leicester performs against its benchmark as follows:

	Leicester	Benchmark (locally adjusted where applicable)
Young students from state schools	87.9%	81.4%
Young students from classes 4, 5, 6, 7	25.3%	24.6%
Young students from low participation neighbourhoods	11.3%	11.1%
Projected learning outcomes: Degree Non-continuation (% not in HE after one year): Low participation neighbourhoods	86.4%	84.2%
Other neighbourhoods	6.9%	6.2%
	4.6%	4.9%

Performance is therefore strong in relation to benchmarks, but in relation to the retention of students from low participation neighbourhoods relative to their peer group from other neighbourhoods, improvement is required, and this is informing the ongoing development of the University's pastoral and learner support systems.

3. Prior to the introduction of variable fees, approximately 40% of the University's students were receiving full or partial LEA/SLC support on the basis of family income below c. £33,000. Our original calculations for bursary payments were based on this figure, providing both support to those with the lowest incomes, and a lower level of assistance to those in the low to middle income group, who we believed might be potentially deterred by the new fees regime.
4. The University's *Strategic Plan 2004/05 to 2007/08* includes the following statement:

The University's approach to student recruitment is demonstrably non-discriminatory. It has, for example, one of the highest proportions of state school students of all the pre-1992 universities, it has a very broad international and ethnic mix of students, it has strong lifelong learning provision and it serves the needs of national and global business and commerce through provision which extends from undergraduate certificate level to taught doctorates through a variety of flexible routes and modes of delivery. The challenge for the University is to maintain the quality of its provision whilst also meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population. Strong student support systems are therefore regarded as a priority.

The Widening Participation Sub-Strategy reflects the University's strategic intentions for learning and teaching and is appended to this access agreement to give context to the intentions set out in this document (Appendix A).

5. The University is working in a sub-regional partnership with De Montfort and Loughborough Universities to deliver the regional targets for widening participation set by the Aimhigher initiative, funding for which has now been extended to 2011. No account has been taken of this in the financial assumptions which underpin this access agreement. The agreement also assumes that the Access to Learning hardship funding will continue.
6. Prior to the introduction of variable fees, the University had no existing bursary arrangements for home undergraduates, and therefore no infrastructure was in place to support new schemes. The additional fee income therefore has to provide for relevant administrative support (see paragraph 14).

Scope of access agreement and intended fee levels

7. This access agreement relates in the main to full-time students. It is the University's intention to apply the bursary and support arrangements set out in this agreement to all those paying a variable fee during the period of this agreement, and to comply with any national agreements on qualifying candidates.
8. The University charged £3000 to all undergraduate students entering its full-time programmes in 2006/07, other than to those accepted for 2005 who request a deferral before 1 August 2005. It also charged £3000 to students registered for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The University is applying only such increases to this fee as are approved by the Government to take account of inflation. The fees to be charged for each whole programme are set out in the University Prospectus and on the University website, and are notified to each applicant (see 18 to 21 below).

Utilisation of additional fees to support new access measures

9. The University provides OFFA with estimates of its investments in access measures arising from the availability of additional fee income, and provides in this agreement an indication of the sums to be made available for specific support measures.
10. The University subscribes to the HEBSS bursary scheme for the purpose of providing all students qualifying for full state support with an annual bursary of the difference between the maximum Maintenance Grant and the annual tuition fee.
11. In addition to this minimum amount, the University is providing annual cash bursaries to full time undergraduate and PGCE students on a sliding scale ranging from £1000 to £100 depending on family income.
12. The University recognises that financial deterrents to progression into HE are not just associated with variable fees or full-time study. It has therefore created from additional fee income an annual fund to provide support to home undergraduate students (including part-time undergraduate students) experiencing hardship because of family background or other adverse domestic circumstances. This fund is managed by its Welfare Service alongside other hardship funds.
13. The bursary schemes and enhanced welfare support are only available to all eligible students ordinarily resident in the UK. The University will take note of legal developments relating to the potential obligation to provide support to non-UK EU students, and will act appropriately as necessary, in line with the recommendations of its own legal advisers.

14. As the University did not offer bursaries to undergraduates from the UK prior to the introduction of variable fees, it did not have an administrative infrastructure to support the arrangements set out above. It therefore now utilises additional fee income to pay for a bursary manager and assistant in order to ensure that disbursement arrangements are undertaken promptly, fairly and accurately
15. In order to assist with student retention, the additional fee income also funds one financial adviser (in addition to an existing post); this advisor has a remit which focuses on the specific needs of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in terms of both one-to-one financial advice and debt counselling, and also the provision of generic advice to prospective students, applicants, existing students and their families.
16. The University is utilising fee income to enhance the support to registered students provided by its Student Support and Development Centre, with the aim both of providing focused learner support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to ease the transition to HE and to enhance the prospects of academic success and also of enhancing welfare and pastoral care to benefit this group.
17. Details of current bursary and student financial support arrangements derived from variable fees are set out in Appendix B to this Agreement.

Provision of information to students

18. The University refers to this access agreement in its Prospectus. There is a fees website so that developments can be broadcast without delay, and the access agreement is published on this site.
19. Each applicant is provided with a booklet setting out information about the fee for each programme and the bursary arrangements, and providing advice on budgeting and financial management. This booklet emphasises the long-term aspects of loan management (i.e. after graduation), provides information about the potential economic benefits of degree-level study.
20. The University's Prospectus includes a substantial section on fees and support, with illustrative examples of income and costs.
21. In the run up to 2006, returning students were periodically reminded that they were liable for higher fees, and the University continues to send specific reminders to applicants about bursary entitlements and application procedures.

Outreach work

22. The University's outreach work is conducted both on its own behalf and through Aimhigher. The current focus of local post-16 activity is the Colleges-University of Leicester Network (CULN), which brings together 21 FE colleges into a non-exclusive partnership with the University and its two validated Colleges of Higher Education. Activity in the pre 16 sector is led through the School and College Services team which provides a central focus for managing university wide activity. The team oversees targeting, tracking and monitoring, child protection and risk assessment issues and has responsibility for the training programmes which enable both undergraduate and postgraduate students to work alongside young people on outreach programmes.
23. The University supports a range of outreach activities, including Summer Schools, mentoring programmes, master classes, academic lectures for schools, visits and presentations. Presentations to prospective students and their parents on financial matters already feature in our national outreach work, and will be developed further to take account of the new fees regime.

24. The University is also engaged in a number of long-term initiatives to promote progression into HE by disadvantaged groups. Alongside the collaborative partnership work undertaken through sub-regional Aimhigher, the university is also engaged in regional partnerships to support targeted work for gifted and talented students from the widening participation cohort through the Excellence Hub and is engaged with East Midlands Routes into Languages. In addition, the university is a provider of the Training and Development Agency Student Associates Scheme. The University wishes to have the capacity to manage a wider range of projects and to undertake the necessary longitudinal research, and is therefore using a proportion of variable fee income to broaden its own capacity for outreach.
25. Our research also tells us that students from local schools and colleges who enter the University are already more likely to be from lower socio-economic groups than those coming from outside the region. In recognition of this pattern, the University has strengthened its schools and colleges liaison team to support progression from the local area. Around forty schools and colleges have been targeted, to which a range of services are provided, including student finance workshops and guidance on application procedures.
26. The University is utilising CULN (see 22 above and widening participation strategies attached) to support new access strategies, and the development of progression routes is a priority. A long-standing foundation programme is franchised to one college (delivering over 30-50 students a year to University science courses), a dedicated Chemistry Year 0 programme is now offered by the University itself, and other 1+3 and other guaranteed pathways are planned.
27. Details of current outreach costs supported by variable fees are set out in Appendix B to this Agreement.

Milestones

28. During the first three years of this Agreement, the University will utilise the HESA Performance Indicators to measure achievement of its aims. It will review the usefulness of this approach at the end of this period, and will at that time either seek OFFA's approval for a continuation of the use of these measures, or for the introduction of new milestones if additional, reliable monitoring information is available at that time.

The initial **milestones** will therefore be:

- to continue to meet year on year the benchmark relating to state school entrants
- to improve performance against the low participation neighbourhood benchmark
- to improve the extent by which other benchmarks listed in paragraph 2 of this Agreement are met by at least 1% over the first three years of this agreement.

The ethnicity, gender, disability and retention profile of PGCE students will be monitored annually utilising the Performance Profile produced for the TDA.

29. During the period up to 2011, the University will also measure its performance through the successful delivery of the sub-regional (i.e. Leicester and Leicestershire) AimHigher recruitment target, which is to increase the number of young entrants to HE by 627 over the number admitted in 2002. This is being undertaken through initiatives designed to:

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- raise aspirations and the motivation to enter HE in young people aged 13 and above who are drawn from the lower socio-economic groups IV and V
- raise the achievements of these young people through work undertaken with schools and colleges to improve their learning skills and capacity to undertake higher-level study
- strengthen progression routes from FE colleges and the workplace.

Institutional monitoring arrangements

30. The University will monitor the fulfilment of this agreement through:
- analysis of applications, acceptances and registrations
 - feedback from recipients of bursaries on the operation of the bursary scheme and from students in general on the provision of other new support systems
 - reviewing the academic performance of students in receipt of bursaries
 - close monitoring of progression and retention data
 - reviewing HESA Performance Indicators annually
 - regular checking of financial outlay relative to income.
31. Monitoring will be undertaken by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Resources) as Chair of the Admissions and Recruitment Advisory Committee, reporting to the Policy and Strategy Committee.

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

STRATEGIC PLAN 2004/05 TO 2007/08

LEARNING AND TEACHING SUB-STRATEGY: WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND IMPROVING ACCESS

Aim

To ensure that all students are selected for entry on the basis of their ability to study at university level, and that unless there are limitations on the availability of places, the only barriers placed in the way of admission to or progression through a programme of study relate to the need to maintain academic standards.

General expectations

That all staff responsible for recruiting and teaching students will adhere to best practice and comply with relevant legislation in the operation of admissions procedures, and that registered students are provided throughout their courses with a level of support appropriate to their needs.

Objectives

To have fair and transparent admissions policies in place which differentiate between applicants on the basis of academic potential and proven achievement

To provide academic support to students as they progress into the University and through each level of their chosen programme which will optimise their ability to fulfil their potential.

To offer, and to expand as far as restrictions on student numbers permit, foundation programmes in local colleges to facilitate progression to first degree courses in the University.

To operate responsive and flexible admissions policies to encourage the participation of mature (over 21) learners

To provide welfare support, including dedicated support for students with disabilities and financial guidance as appropriate, in order to optimise retention and successful completion.

To facilitate non-graduate entry to postgraduate programmes in appropriate disciplines by providing flexible entry routes through University diplomas, the recognition of professional skills and competences, and the accreditation of relevant prior learning.

To offer foundation degrees in areas which reflect the University's academic strengths.

To meet all the requirements of the Excellence Challenge: AimHigher initiative, and to contribute fully to other programmes designed to facilitate improved access to HE nationally and in the region.

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Commentary

The University's widening participation strategy has four strands.

Full-time undergraduate courses are offered across a range of disciplines to students from across the UK; the population is drawn predominantly from the state school sector.

The University offers postgraduate and post-experience training in full-time, part-time and distance-learning modes, with a concentration of student numbers in the last of these. Pathways have been developed for entry to postgraduate study which do not require students with business experience to have completed a first degree in the discipline, and for many students, these courses form their first experience of higher education.

The University also has a long-standing history of involvement in adult education provision, and undergraduate part-time study opportunities have found a new focus through the establishment in August 2000 of the Institute of Lifelong Learning. All certificate-level provision has now been internally accredited at undergraduate first-year level, and pathways are being developed between certificates and other provision, including foundation degrees.

The foundation degrees themselves constitute the fourth strand of the University's widening participation strategy. At the time of the publication of this Plan, the University has five foundation degrees in operation and has funding for two more.

The University's developing widening participation strategies are supported by a much more pro-active approach to collaboration than was the case in the 1990s. The University seeks from its educational partners a compatibility with its general ethos, and it has been fortunate to find a number of collaborators who are sympathetic to its aims. The most significant examples of close collaboration are the 'validation plus' relationships established in 2003 with Bishop Grosseteste and Newman Colleges of Higher Education, and the long-standing partnership with Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College through which undergraduate foundation programmes are offered (from 2005, this partnership will also support a foundation degree). The University is unfortunately prevented by external funding constraints from engaging in new activities which would lead to an increased home/EU student intake, but it will continue to forge links with schools and colleges to facilitate progression and to broaden the student profile within existing numbers (including collaborations arising from the Colleges-University of Leicester Network).

The University has been seeking opportunities for non HEFCE-funded collaboration (an example is the Diploma in Higher Education in Operating Department Practice funded by the NHS). The University is a partner in the UKHEP initiative designed to provide post-qualification for nurses and it is also participating in the NHSU teaching partnership led by the University of Warwick.

The 'skills ladder' human resources strategy of the NHS is likely to provide the University with many other opportunities for involvement in the training and development of hospital workforces, including the provision of new foundation degrees, certificates and diplomas, and CPD programmes. A major development in this regard is partnership with De Montfort University and the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust to develop the Multi Professional Education and Training Centre (MPET) as a major strand of the Pathway Project at the General Hospital site.

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The Colleges-University of Leicester Network has twenty four member colleges, including Bishop Grosseteste and Newman Colleges of Higher Education, whose awards the University validates, as senior members. CULN is a non-exclusive grouping which is specifically designed to explore opportunities for collaboration, student progression and the sharing of expertise, and has stimulated activities ranging from the development of foundation degrees to staff and curriculum development.

The University is a committed partner in local and regional widening participation initiatives, and works closely and profitably with the other Leicestershire universities on a number of specific widening participation projects. It also collaborates with other East Midlands universities in specific projects which take forward the general aim of enhancing opportunities for access to higher education. The University relies heavily on the involvement of academic departments in reach-out activities, but it has recently expanded the administrative support provided for widening-participation, and it has embraced additional opportunities such as expanded summer school activities; it will continue this pro-active strategy for the duration of this Plan.

The University will undertake the activities set out above alongside its ongoing commitment to the Excellence Challenge AimHigher: Partnerships for Progression initiative, the activities and targets for which are not incorporated here.

The University will also focus increased attention on issues of access, equality, progression and retention. The aim will be to optimise student performance, irrespective of background. The University will extend its annual and periodic monitoring and review processes to ensure that any problems in learner support systems are revealed, and it will deepen its on-going scrutiny of assessment outcomes in order to reveal patterns of performance differentiated by academic and social background, gender, race and disability.

It is the University's intention that in terms of social background, its undergraduate student profile should remain broad-based after the introduction of variable fees in 2006, and it will therefore endeavour to operate recruitment procedures, including bursary schemes, which will sustain its general widening participation strategies. It will work with sector representatives, Government and other relevant parties with the aim of establishing fair, transparent and operationally efficient student funding procedures to underpin the new fees regime.

Key Performance Targets

To meet, and where possible exceed, the widening participation Performance Indicator benchmarks published by HESA (ongoing through the period of this Plan).

To continue to recruit predominantly from the state school sector (ongoing through the period of this Plan, to be measured by the relevant HESA PI) (see above).

To continue the process of developing progression data to inform retention strategies, and in particular, to capture information about performance to support the University's equality policies and to act on this as necessary (ongoing through the period of this Plan).

To develop by 2005/06 an undergraduate access strategy and a fair and transparent bursary system to support widening participation after variable fees are introduced.

To bring together and publish the University's policies on the accreditation of prior learning.

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2006/07 TO 2010/11

BURSARY AND STUDENT SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS 2008/09

The University subscribes to the HEBSS bursary scheme for the purpose of providing all students qualifying for full state support with an annual bursary of the difference between the maximum Maintenance Grant and the annual tuition fee. In 2008/09, this means that all students with a residual household income of £25,000 or less will receive an annual bursary of £310.

In addition to this minimum amount, the University is also providing annual cash bursaries to full time undergraduate and PGCE students on a sliding scale ranging from £1,000 to £100 depending on residual household income. In 2008/09, total bursary entitlements will be:

Household income up to £20,000:	£1,310*
Household income from £20,001 to £25,000:	£1,010*
Household income: from £25,001 to £30,000	£400
Household income from £30,001 to £35,000	£250
Household income from £35,001 to £40,000	£100

*including £310 minimum bursary

The University will also provide from its variable fee income annual additional support to students as follows:

Additional Hardship Fund	£70,000
Additional Financial Advisor	£36,000
Additional learner/pastoral support	£40,000
Bursary administration and advice	£55,000

Outreach work

The total cost of outreach work in schools, colleges funded by variable fee income in 2008/09 will be approximately £200,000, including staff and activity costs.