

## WRITTLE COLLEGE

### ACCESS AGREEMENT 2014/15

#### FEE LIMITS

From September 2014 Writtle College will charge new full-time home-region undergraduate students **£9000** per annum for all eligible courses. Part-time students will be charged a pro-rata fee according to the amount of study undertaken.

The £9000 fee will not apply to students who commenced their programmes in previous years. They will be charged as follows:

- Full-time Students who commenced their studies in 2013 will pay **£8750** per year in 2014/15.
- Full-time Students who commenced their studies in 2012 will pay **£8500** per year in 2014/15.
- Part-time students who commenced their studies in 2013 or 2012 will be charged a pro-rata fee according to the amount of study undertaken.
- Part-time students will not be charged more than £6,750 in an academic year.
- Full-time students who commenced their studies in 2011 (i.e 'Old System' students) will be charged as follows: BSc/BA -£3465; FDS/ FDa £3465.
- Part-time students who commenced their studies in 2011 will be charged a pro-rata fee according to the amount of study undertaken.

We plan to raise the tuition fee for full-time new entrants in 2015/16 if the permitted maximum is increased. For continuing students who started in earlier years we anticipate raising their fee in line with inflation and our increasing costs.

#### EXPENDITURE ON ADDITIONAL ACCESS MEASURES

In 2014/15 we estimate spending on additional access and retention measures to comprise:

- £416,869 on bursaries, fee waivers and scholarships
- £55,000 on marketing activities aimed at supporting applications from under-represented groups (pre-entry expenditure).
- £120,000 on a range of outreach work targeted at under-represented groups.
- £160,000 on a slate of measures and activities embedded in our Learning and Teaching to support student success and retention.

#### ADDITIONAL ACCESS MEASURES

##### Financial Support for Students: Bursaries

We believe that bursaries are a useful retention measure and have a role to play in ensuring that students do not discontinue their studies as a result of immediate financial hardship. The National

Union of Students have consistently articulated the view that bursaries – paid directly to students according to their financial circumstances – are far preferable to fee waivers. Our Student Union Liaison Group endorsed the College’s continued commitment to bursaries at our meeting of March 12<sup>th</sup> 2013. Accordingly, we will offer the following bursaries:

1. New undergraduate students on household incomes under £25,000 and in receipt of the full state maintenance grant will receive a bursary of £500.
2. New undergraduate students on household incomes between £25,000 and £30,000 will receive a bursary of £200.
3. New undergraduate students on household incomes between £30,000 and £40,000 will receive a bursary of £150.
4. Any remaining eligible undergraduate students who commenced their programmes prior to September 2012 and who will be paying fees as listed on p1. will receive bursaries as follows;
  - Undergraduate students on household incomes under £25,000 and in receipt of the full state maintenance grant will receive a bursary of £547<sup>1</sup>. (This is the minimum stipulated £347 plus an additional £200.)
  - Undergraduate students on household incomes between £25,000 and £30,000 will receive a bursary of £200.
  - Undergraduate students on household incomes between £30,000 and £40,000 will receive a bursary of £150.

### **Financial Support for Students: National Scholarship Programme**

- In 2014/15 Writtle College will offer free on-site term-time accommodation and ten meals per week for up to 28 full-time students under the National Scholarship Scheme for their first year of study. (30 Full-time places will be awarded if there are no part-time applicants) For paying students the cost of this accommodation and food package is at least £4000 per annum. Therefore the Writtle College contribution to the NSP will be worth at least £120,000 per annum.
- This will be offered on a ‘first come, first served’ basis according to when applicants accept an offer of a place. The sole criterion for eligibility to apply for an NSP award will be that the student is in receipt of a full grant. Hence, no one with a declared income over £25,000 will be eligible.
- The NSP is also available to part-time students (according to the same eligibility requirements, and awarded according to the same ‘first come, first served’ process). However, for part-time students the scholarship comprises a partial fee waiver – pro-rata, according to the amount of credit studied.
- The Government contribution to the NSP (£2000 per Full-time student) will be awarded in the form of a partial fee waiver for the first year of study.

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<sup>1</sup> Actual figure will be slightly higher as stipulated minimum rises for students on the current scheme.

## Our Strategic Approach

Our priority areas are to encourage and increase progression to Higher Education of students from under-represented backgrounds and to ensure the success of those students (in terms of retention, achievement, careers) once they have become Writtle students. Through 2013/14 we intend to sharpen our evaluation of student performance – by socio-economic background, protected characteristics etc. – to better analyse and shape our access strategy. Currently, the Head of Higher Education monitors and reports on College performance in respect of access, but in Autumn 2013 an ‘Access Group’ will assume this responsibility. The group will be chaired by the Head of Higher Education and will include the Director of Academic Standards, Head of Learning & Teaching, Deputy Head of Further Education, Head of Registry, Heads of School, and representatives from the Students’ Union, Finance, and Marketing. Meeting three times yearly, from September 2013, its remit will be to evaluate all aspects of Access, from our promotion of access to Higher Education generally, thorough to the employability of Writtle graduates from under-represented groups. The Access Group will advise the Senior Management Team and Academic Board, report on the effectiveness of access measures, and recommend changes to access strategy. Data from Registry and Finance as well as information from questionnaires and focus groups conducted by the Students’ Union and Marketing will be used to inform decision-making. The Access group will also recommend updates to the Access Agreement in line with OFFA guidelines, and in response to progress against our milestones.

## Outreach

1. As a Higher Education Institution with a significant population of Further Education students, a key aspect of Widening Participation strategy at Writtle College continues to be the fostering of progression from our Further to our Higher Education provision. Although we are also engaged in a range of relevant links and activities with schools and colleges our ‘dual’ status places us in a special position to promote internal FE to HE progression. Our internal progression aim is that 20% of our eligible level 3 FE completers should progress to Higher Education at Writtle College. We will work with College FE Lecturing staff to encourage level 3 FE learners to consider Higher Education, assist them in the decision-making and application process, and prepare them for the expectations of the University sector. These sessions will benefit all our FE-to-HE progression students, whether they continue their studies at Writtle or elsewhere. We will continue to offer progression incentives in the form of partial fee waivers for students who progress from FE courses at Writtle to our undergraduate courses. A recent FE-to-HE progression conference at Writtle (May 2013) created an opportunity for subject teams spanning FE and HE levels to evaluate the effectiveness of our progression measures. A key outcome was identifying that scheduling events intended to promote HE study and support the application process needed to take place even earlier in FE learners’ programmes than had previously been the case. The value of having HE teams deliver classes and ‘aspiration-raising’ sessions was also confirmed. As a consequence of this evaluation we also determined that our ‘follow-up’ from progression activities would be expanded to bolster our existing support for learners through the application process.
2. In addition to those FE completers from Writtle, the College also seeks to raise aspirations and facilitate access for students from other FE colleges and schools, especially from areas of low participation. We will continue to engage in a range of activities with local schools and colleges that encourage and prepare students to consider, apply for, and succeed on land-based Higher Education courses. In 2012/13 visits to FE providers such as Oaklands College, Otley College and Chelmsford College by the Head of Higher Education and other academic staff facilitated presentations and Q&A for learners interested in progressing to HE. Post-visit dialogue and evaluation with their FE course teams has led to the development of bespoke

visit days, where the Colleges will bring cohorts to Writtle for learning experiences that involve our specialist facilities and expertise.

3. We will continue to offer a portfolio of Foundation Degrees and HE level 4 qualifications to attract students from vocational study routes and those who cannot commit to three years of full-time study. We will also continue to offer flexible study options that facilitate work-based learning.
4. We will also deliver a range of outreach activities that share our skills, resources and enthusiasm with a much broader constituency. Our Centre for the Arts and Design in the Environment (CADE) and staff from across the College deliver learning experiences for school pupils (both primary and secondary), training and networking events for teachers & careers advisers, and skills development sessions for a wide range of learners including job-seekers. This involves both events hosted at the College that make use of our 550 acre estate, our science and arts facilities, as well as projects where Writtle academic staff visit schools and other venues. We aim to deliver 30 events annually, involving up to 5000 participants in total. At our annual 'Essex Schools Food and Farming Day', held each May, 3000 primary school students spend a day at the College. Held since 2008, the Food and Farming Day is the principal element of our long-term outreach work, supplemented by numerous one-on-one interactions between the College and individual primary schools on land-based, arts, and aspiration-raising projects. Necessarily long-term in its ambitions, our work with primary schools both raises young learners' awareness of environmental, food and animal-related topics and introduces them to the idea of studying them in a Higher Education context. Every year we receive positive feedback from teachers, children, and participating farmers on the value of their experiences. Pre-event briefings are held for teachers and our evaluation indicates that the day delivers maximum learner value when teachers are pre-briefed; accordingly this aspect of the preparation is being strengthened in 2013.
5. The College recognises that it has not been engaged in significant collaborative outreach work with other Higher Education Institutions. In part, this has been because the distinctive nature of our portfolio and curricula mean that we are not offering subjects that are routinely offered in other regional universities. However, our intention is to develop through 2013/14 collaborative work with local HEIs. This is likely to include our validating partner, the University of Essex, and our near-neighbour in Chelmsford, Anglia Ruskin University. The Access Group will explore ways in which collaborative working may allow for effective use of our different resources.
6. Overall expenditure on Outreach work targeted at under-represented groups is calculated at £120,000, based on current data. This reflects the cost of staff time devoted to all outreach activities, scaled to reflect the proportion(s) of students/beneficiaries from under-represented groups in those activities. Where exact proportions are not known, we assume a proportion in line with the existing Higher Education population of whom 10.6% of young full-time first degree entrants are identified as being from low participation neighbourhoods (HESA data, based on POLAR 3 method), while 16% have a disability (Unit-e data). As a 'dual' provider of FE and HE we are well-placed to identify relevant students in our existing FE student body of whom 10.7% receive discretionary learner support (an income-based measure) and 23.3% have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (Writtle FE student data). In 2012 25% (67 FTE) of eligible FE completers with known outcomes progressed to Higher Education at Writtle and elsewhere following a range of progression-oriented outreach activities delivered by HE, FE, and support staff.

## Student Retention and Success

The College will use student fee income to invest in a range of measures that will have a positive impact in terms of student retention and success.

- There will be a continued emphasis on student support from module leaders and course leaders. This will involve tutorials, catch-up sessions, on-line support, and immediate feedback following presentations.
- We will offer a comprehensive range of Learner Services that enable Higher Education students to succeed on their chosen programmes. This includes: discretionary financial assistance through the 'Access to Learning Fund' to alleviate unexpected hardship; welfare and counselling services; support for students with specific learning difficulties or disabilities.
- The Head of Higher Education and Heads of Schools will hold one-on-one meetings with students identified by their Course Scheme managers or Module leaders as being 'at risk' (i.e. they have failed an early assignment or have missed classes without good cause).
- In Writtle School of Design – we will deliver additional 'open studios' for students needing extra help, plus an early formative 'screening' assignment in a 1<sup>st</sup> year module to identify students with writing issues, plus an increased emphasis on staff office hours as an opportunity to be helped.
- In the School of Sport, Equine & Animal Science – we will continue to deliver additional maths classes alongside a key 1<sup>st</sup> year module. These will be 1 hour sessions, available at different time slots.
- To continue our 'Open Door' policy of ad hoc tutorials and student support from lecturing staff.

For the proportion of students in our learning community drawn from under-represented groups (anticipated at 38% of students being identified in NS SEC 4-7 in 2013/14) we project that the cost of these initiatives will be £150,000 in 2013/14, rising – with increased HE numbers - to £190,000 in 2016/17.

## Our Assessment of Our Access and Retention Record

We evaluate our progress in achieving Access Agreement goals by monitoring and assessing a wide range of evidence. Many targets (including those related to progression, completion, ethnicity, disability, age) are encompassed by the College's comprehensive datasets relating to the make-up of the student body and student performance. Our student information system – Unit-e – is continuously updated and allows for year-on-year comparison. Data are considered at a range of College meetings; from individual Course Scheme Reviews and examination boards through to Academic Board. From 2013 the College will also use its Equality and Diversity Group as a key instrument to monitor and assess progress as well as to recommend relevant measures.

- In Autumn 2012 6.2% of our eligible level 3 Further Education completers progressed to Higher Education courses at Writtle College. *This is a 2.1% increase on the 2011 figure but much lower than in earlier years and below our milestone figure. We believe that increases in tariff points for 2011 entry and thereafter have deterred some of our internal applicants. (i.e. their FE grades would not be sufficient to gain entry to our Bachelor's or Foundation degrees though they could join Higher Certificates or other level 4 awards) For 2012 entry we trialled*

*internal FE-to-HE progression bursaries (which were not in place when our 2012/13 access agreement was devised) and are continuing them for 2013/14 and beyond.*

- Black and ethnic minority students comprised 14% of the Higher Education student body in 2012/13. *This figure is slightly higher than previous years.*
- In 2012/13 16% of our Higher Education students had a disability. *This figure is the same as the previous year.*
- In 2012/13 54.6 % of our students were aged 21+. *This is slightly higher than in the previous year but a 10% reduction on 2009/10 and earlier. The impact of ELQ funding arrangements has meant a reduction in mature, degree-qualified, applicants to Writtle (especially in Horticulture) which has altered our age demographic.*
- Since 2008 the College has engaged in more than 30 Outreach events annually, benefiting 4,000-5,000 participants annually. Feedback from participants – including co-sponsors such as Essex County Council – is overwhelmingly positive and helps us to shape future events.
- In 2011/12 11.4% of our full-time home-region undergraduates were ‘non-completers’ (HESA11 data). *This is an improvement on the previous year. We predict steady improvement in this figure in the future as a result of several retention initiatives, an increased proportion of Honours degree students, and significantly increased tariff points for entry.*

## **Targets and Milestones**

Our Targets and Milestones for 2012/13 to 2016/17:

1. 15% of our eligible level 3 completers from Further Education should progress to our Higher Education courses in 2012/3, rising to 20% in 2016/7.
2. In terms of the proportion of our student body drawn from areas of relative deprivation, we intend to grow the percentage identified in NS-SEC 4-7 tables from 38% to 39% (HESA table 1a). (2012-17)
3. The proportion of the HE student body drawn from black and ethnic minority groups should be no less than 10%. (2012-17)
4. To maintain the proportion of HE students who are disabled at 15% or greater. (2012-17)
5. To maintain the proportion of HE students aged 21+ at 57% or greater. (2012-17)
6. To sustain our education outreach activity (in terms of volume and variety) at the high level attained in previous years, notwithstanding the cessation of Aimhigher funding – to deliver at least 30 events benefiting 5,000 participants annually. (2012-17).
7. ‘Non-completion’ for full-time home-region undergraduates should be less than 10% for academic year 2012/13, dropping to 7% by academic year 2016/17.

## **Institutional Monitoring Arrangements**

The Head of Higher Education will report on matters relating to the Access Agreement at the College's Senior Management Team. Registry will continue to monitor the student population against HESA benchmarks and in terms of relevant equality and diversity categories. Finance will continue to monitor the uptake of College bursaries. Outreach activities will be reported upon by relevant departments, including the academic areas and Marketing.

The *Access Agreement Monitoring Return* and *Widening Participation Strategic Assessment*, compiled by the Head of Higher Education with input from all the departments above, is the key document in which our bursary, outreach and WP objectives are reviewed.

## **Information for Students**

We are committed to providing information to students in a clear and timely fashion. Information regarding fee levels and bursaries will be available as a supplement to our Prospectus, in leaflets for applicants, and on our website. The Student Handbook, given to all students, provides full information regarding our fees and bursaries. The College runs poster campaigns through the year and sends targeted e-mails to encourage eligible students to apply. Staff in Marketing, Finance and Registry also provide relevant information and advice to prospective students through Open Days, UCAS Fairs and Schools Liaison activities.

## **Consultation with Students**

Students were extensively consulted through 2011/12 as the College prepared for the dramatic change in Higher Education funding that began in Autumn 2012. Focus groups and working lunches were held that discussed fee-levels, bursary arrangements, and outreach & retention activities. The 2014/15 fee-level and access package were most recently debated at the College Student Union Liaison Group in March 2013. The agreed fee of **£9000** for 2014/15 and other access and retention measures were endorsed by the SU representatives.

## **Equality Issues**

This agreement, like its predecessors, takes equality issues into account as per the Equality Act 2010. Targets for disabled and BME students, as well as for students from areas of relative deprivation are included and will be comprehensively monitored. The agreement aligns with our *Single Equality Scheme 2011-2015* in "recognising that everyone is different, respecting and encouraging these differences and valuing the benefits diversity brings." We believe that Equality and Diversity are central to achieving the goals set out in our Strategic Plan, whilst enhancing our cultural profile and labour demographic.



Optional commentary on milestones. This box is character-limited to 1000 characters; however, we are happy for you to upload additional 'supporting information' as a separate Word/pdf document.

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