

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2017/18

Writtle College is a specialist Higher Education Institute (HEI) that has been providing educational excellence in the land based sector for over 120 years. Currently the College has approximately 900 higher education (HE) learners studying undergraduate and post-graduate level programmes. The College offers undergraduate programmes in the areas of Agriculture, Animal Science, Art and Design, Conservation, Equine, Garden Design, Horticulture, Landscape Architecture, Professional Floristry and Veterinary Physiotherapy. The College continues to aspire to excellence in education and research. It provides a distinctive place to study, with a mission to transform lives and the environment through inspiring education.

FEE LIMITS

From September 2017 Writtle College will charge new full-time home-region undergraduate students £9,000 per annum for all eligible courses. Part-time students 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.

Currently the College does not offer programmes that incorporate a sandwich year. However, curriculum and programme developments under consideration may result in the introduction of industry based sandwich in future years. If sandwich years are introduced the fee for a sandwich year would be a maximum of £1,350.

The College will raise the tuition fees for full-time new entrants if the permitted regulated maximum is increased.

EXPENDITURE ON ADDITIONAL ACCESS MEASURES

The College will continue to allocate approximately 33% of the higher fee income it receives to support access and measures to promote student success and progression. Based on its estimated student numbers for 2017/18, the College forecasts the total Ofpa accountable funding allocated to these measures will be approximately £736,000 (i.e. in excess of 33% of the estimated higher fee income). This is slightly lower than indicated in the 2016/17 Access Agreement due to a reduction in student numbers.

Despite a reduction in student numbers, under this Access Agreement planned expenditure for student financial support has been maintained in absolute terms at the 2016/17 level of £293,000. The nature of this support continues to be diversified, with the introduction of bursaries designed to promote student success, progression and employability. The College will closely monitor and keep the impact of these changes under review.

In 2017/18 the College anticipates spending on additional access, student success and progression measures:

- £293,000 on financial support for students (Retained at previous 2016/17 level)
- £181,000 on a range of outreach and access activities targeted at under-represented groups.
- £261,000 on a slate of measures and activities embedded in our learning and teaching to support student success, retention and progression.

Expenditure may vary depending on the actual levels of recruitment and the higher fee income generated.

Financial Support for Students: Bursaries

Our Student Union Liaison Group has endorsed the College's continued commitment to bursaries but has recommended that to be most effective an element of the support should be specifically targeted to help students meet the additional material and equipment costs associated with study as well as helping students to cover their living and accommodation costs. Accordingly, we will continue to 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.

Subject to satisfactory academic progression these bursaries will be available to the student in each year of their studies and paid to part-time students on a pro-rata basis.

The following additional bursaries will be available to students within our access target groups who are able to demonstrate hardship. We continue to take account of the views and advice of our Student Union and the student body in formulating these additional support bursaries. We have adopted their recommendation that these should not be paid directly to a student as 'cash in pocket support' but set against the purchase and payment of appropriate equipment and expenses, which may in some cases include those associated with accommodation and living costs. Students may apply for this additional level of financial support during each year of study. The number of bursaries available will be capped, and distributed to those students meeting the appropriate criteria on a 'first come' basis.

- 1) Skills and employability bursaries: The College will provide additional skills bursaries worth £300 a year. These bursaries will help students to access opportunities to obtain sector specific transferable skills and vocational qualifications. Expenditure on the Skills and employability bursaries will aid student progression to employment and post-graduate study.
- 2) Education resources and equipment bursaries: The College will provide additional bursaries worth £300 a year to help students to meet the exceptional additional material and equipment cost they may encounter during their studies and help promote student success.
- 3) Further Education (FE) to HE progression bursaries limited to students with a full level 3 BTEC, City & Guilds of similar vocational based qualification and Access Diploma students. The bursary, worth £1500 a year, for the standard length of their course, is only available to FE students studying at Writtle College, or at an institution that has a FE to HE progression agreement in place with the College.

- 4) Care leavers will be offered a bursary worth £1500 a year for each year of their studies.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The College embraces the role it plays as a driver of social mobility. In line with the Green Paper *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*¹ this access agreement has been written in response to the challenging targets set by Government in respect of doubling the percentage of students from disadvantaged background entering higher education by 2020 (compared to 2009), and increasing the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) students going into higher education by 20% by 2020. As highlighted in the letter of guidance from the Secretary of State for BIS and the Minister of State for Universities and Science², the Green Paper also identifies other disparities, most notably the need to improve participation amongst young White males from lower social-economic groups whose participation in HE is particularly poor; and to improve the outcomes of higher education study for BME students, which are generally lower than those of White students.

To successfully promote student participation from the lower socio-economic groups, and improve retention and achievement, the College continues to provide a balanced suite of interventions and outreach activities specifically designed to provide tailored support throughout the entire student lifecycle. To achieve this, an integrated institution-wide approach has been adopted that bridges the Further and Higher education divide, and involves all departments that support HE and FE students.

As an HEI that also provides FE, the College is well placed to promote HE participation among its FE learners and support their transition from FE to HE. Measures to increase FE progression into HE are not designed solely to support internal progression but progression into HE within a range of institutions both nationally and internationally.

In line with developing this Access agreement, the College also aims to develop a clearer, evidence based approach that measures specific outcomes as well as the inputs of the work that we do to raise aspiration and attainment and support students throughout their studies and as they prepare for employment or further study. In accordance with this, we will continue to place emphasis and expenditure on activities associated with outreach, including long term outreach, and measures to improve student opportunities and performance. We also continue to believe that carefully targeted bursaries can support student achievement and have a role to play in ensuring that students do not discontinue their studies as a result of immediate financial hardship. For this reason, we will continue to offer a limited number of financial measures designed to support our access priority groups

In line with 2016/17, the College has identified the following priority groups to target in 2017/18:

- a) Students from low participation neighbourhoods and low income backgrounds recruited both regionally and nationally;
- b) Care leavers;

¹ *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. BIS November 2015

² *Letter of Guidance from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister of State for Universities and Science to the Director of Fair Access*, <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11-02-2016-OFFA-Guidance.pdf>, 13 April 2016

- c) Access to HE Diploma (QAA validated) and entrants with a full level 3 BTEC, City & Guilds or similar vocational based qualification;
- d) Disabled students.

And in line with Government priorities, will also focus on:

- e) Achievement of White males.

It is widely acknowledged that the qualification landscape is more diverse than ever before, with less than two-thirds (63%) of UK 18 year olds applying to HE in 2015 studying the traditional set of three A levels, the A level remains the most successful route into the most competitive academic courses. Over a quarter (36%) of English students accepted into Higher Education in 2015 holding at least one BTEC in their set of qualifications³. Because of the practical nature of its land based provision, the College has always accepted a large proportion of its learners onto HE courses via the more non-traditional route and we will continue to increase existing activities and measures designed to improve the retention and employability of students entering HE with an Access to HE Diploma or full Level 3 Diploma qualifications. In 2015/16 approximately 73% of our students entered higher education at Writtle College with non 'A'-level qualifications, of which only 6.8% were studying for a Foundation Degree, the remainder were studying on a full degree programmes.

Collaboration

The College recognises that outside of its links with local schools and Further Education Colleges, it has not previously engaged in sufficient collaborative outreach work with other Higher Education Institutions. In part, this has been rectified throughout 2015/16 with the work that has been undertaken as part of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) group. The college has collaborated with the University of Essex, Anglia Ruskin University, South Essex College, Colchester Institute and Essex County Council to provide a range of engagement activities targeted at the following groups:

- Students from low income households
- Students who live in areas of low participation - POLAR 3 data
- Students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties
- Children in care
- Mature students
- Students from minority ethnic groups
- Young carers

This collaboration has been so successful that the group intend to bid for additional HEFCE funding which will be made available to help meet the Government's challenging goals of doubling the participation of students from disadvantaged background entering higher education by 2020.

In addition to increasing the number of outreach activities undertaken in partnership with other providers, the College will continue to use its involvement with national sector bodies e.g., HEA, Landex and Guild HE to help support the development of student opportunities, teaching and learning. Increasing collaborative engagement with sector bodies to enhance the student

³ UCAS, <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/more-support-needed-he-students-non-traditional-qualifications>, 12 April 2016

experience and success is embedded in the new College HE Strategy and the HE Teaching and Learning Strategy. The involvement in these networks allows good practice in the sector to be identified and adopted by the College. The College is committed through these networks to undertaking a number of actions designed to enhance student success. The success of these interventions will aid the college in achieving the milestones and targets set out in this agreement.

Monitoring and tracking of progress

The College appreciates that there are potential overlaps in the impacts and effectiveness of some of the measures and actions included in this Access Agreement. In order to achieve the best outcome for students it may be necessary to vie funding between the different categories of expenditure.

Through the 'Access Group', established in 2013, the College has and will continue to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of measures aimed at improving access, retention and achievement. The Group, chaired by the Vice Principal (Academic), includes the Head of Academic Standards, Head of Learning & Teaching, Head of Curriculum (FE), Head of Registry, Heads of Schools, and representatives from the Students' Union, Finance, Learning, Marketing and Careers Services. Meeting at least three times yearly, its remit is to evaluate all aspects of access, from our promotion of access to HE generally, through to the employability and the destination of graduates from our priority groups. The Access Group advises the Senior Management Team and Academic Board on the effectiveness of access measures, and recommends changes to access strategy. Data from Registry and Finance as well as information from questionnaires and focus groups conducted by the Student Union and Marketing will be used to inform decision-making. The Access Group recommends updates to the Access Agreement in line with Offa guidelines, the new national strategy and in response to progress against our milestones. The Access Group is key in allowing the College to develop and implement an institutional wide strategy.

ADDITIONAL ACCESS MEASURES

Access, Outreach and Widening Participation

1. As a HEI with a significant population of FE students, a key aspect of the strategic approach to widening participation continues to be the fostering of progression from our Further to our Higher Education provision. A wide range of events and intervention take place, including HE taster and experience events, individual mentoring of FE learners, and support with the HE application process. The Student Union is helping to facilitate HE and FE peer mentoring and support. These activities not only target internal progression from FE to HE, but also serve to increase the aspiration of FE students more generally, so that many will go onto higher education at other institutions.
2. In previous Access Agreements the College has articulated the aspirational aim that 20% of eligible level 3 FE completers should progress internally to Higher Education at Writtle College. On reflection, we consider that this target is too narrow in focus and a more appropriate target is to increase the total proportion of eligible Writtle FE students progressing to HE, whether that be at Writtle College or elsewhere. We will work with College FE Lecturing staff to encourage level 3 FE learners to consider HE, 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 regardless of whether they continue their studies at Writtle or elsewhere. In 2012 25% of eligible FE completers with known outcomes progressed to HE at Writtle and elsewhere. Using the 2012 figure as a benchmark, College will aim to increase this proportion, with a long-term target of 35% of eligible level 3 learners progressing to HE.

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. The College will also continue to organise and run a joint FE and HE staff progression workshops to raise aspirations and promote FE student progression.

3. The College will continue to work actively in collaboration with its regional partners to promote access and enhance student opportunities and success.
4. 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 and regional schools and colleges that encourage and prepare students to consider, apply for, and succeed on land-based Higher Education courses.
5. 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 and help support students wishing to study part-time.
6. We will deliver a range of outreach activities that share our skills, resources and enthusiasm with a much broader constituency. 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. We will seek to work in partnership with other providers of Further and Higher Education and from 2016 we will ensure that at least 5 activities undertaken are designed to address the needs of part-time and mature learners and target areas of low participation.
7. Working in partnership with regional schools via the Essex Agricultural Society the annual 'Essex Schools Food and Farming Day', held each May, 3000 primary school pupils spend a day at the College. Held since 2008, the Food and Farming Day has been a key 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 HE 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 continues to be strengthened.

8. Expenditure on outreach and access work reflects the cost of materials and staff time devoted to these activities, scaled to reflect the proportion(s) of students/beneficiaries from our priority groups supported by or involved in the activity.

Measures to promote Student Retention, Success and Progression

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

1. There will be a continued emphasis on targeted student support from module leaders and course leaders. This will involve tutorials, catch-up sessions, on-line support, and immediate feedback following presentations.
2. We will continue to offer a comprehensive range of Learner Services that enable Higher Education students from our priority groups to succeed on their chosen programmes.
3. We will deliver additional support for students needing extra study help and continue to develop early formative 'screening' assignments at Level 4 to identify students with writing issues.
4. We will continue to deliver additional maths classes alongside a key 1st year module. These will be 1 hour sessions, available at different time slots.
5. We will continue our 'Open Door' policy of ad hoc tutorials and student support from lecturing staff.
6. A range of 'workshop' sessions and events will be delivered to support and promote student employment and progression to post graduate studies.
7. We will increase opportunities for students to gain additional work and practical vocational skills to help support employability.
8. Through its involvement with sector networks the College will engage in collaborative activities and interventions design to enhance student opportunity, achievement and employability.

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. Greater emphasis has been placed on the monitoring of data sets, particularly in relation to our priority access groups by course teams. A new Course Scheme Review process has been implemented, this requires course teams to set specific targets and monitor progress towards the milestones and aspirations presented in our Access Agreement.

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. College makes use of its Equality and Diversity Group as a key instrument to monitor and assess progress as well as to recommend relevant measures. The cross membership between the Equality and Diversity Group with the Access Group ensures that the potential equality and diversity impacts of actions embedded in this Access Agreement are considered during their development and evaluated once implemented.

- In 2014/15 the number of Further Education Students who were eligible to progress to a Higher Education course increased from 29.3% in 2013/14 to 32.7% in 2014/15, an increase of 3.4%.
- In 2014/15 85% of students enrolled on HE courses were White British. The next biggest group was Other Asian with 5% of students, followed by 2% of students recorded as Black or Black British African. 0.32% of students were recorded as ‘unknown’ and 1.48% of ‘students refused information’. The majority of BME students were enrolled on Professional Floristry, Landscape Garden Design and Agriculture courses.
- In 2014/15 the number of students with a declared disability fell by 1% in comparison to 2013/14 to 16%. Within this, the number of students who declared a specific learning difficulty fell by 2.35% to 7.38% of enrolments – this was the area with the highest percentage of declared needs. The number of students with a declared mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder increased from 2.56% in 2013/14 to 3.59% in 2014/15.
- In 2014/15 around 44% of our students were aged 21+. The College continues to be successful in slowing the recent decline in mature student numbers from its height 2009/10. This decline in part reflects the historical impact of ELQ funding arrangements which has meant a reduction in mature, degree-qualified, applicants to Writtle (especially in Horticulture).
- The College has engaged in more than 30 Outreach events, 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 2014/15 10.5% of our full-time home-region undergraduates were ‘non-completers’. This figure has not changed substantially from the previous year. The progress of Foundation Degree students onto full Honours degrees has improved and currently stands at approximately 70%. As the College accumulates evidence on the variation in success rates between entrants it will use this data to shape future intervention.

Targets and Milestones

In the light of our strategic aims, in 2015/16 the College has reviewed the existing targets and set new milestones to 2019/20. In addition to adding new targets we have reassessed individual benchmarks and where appropriate, to improve monitoring, we have changed the data source used to track achievement.

Our Targets and Milestones for 2017/18 to 2020/21

1. **FE student progression into HE.** The College aims to increase the total percentage of eligible Writtle College FE students progressing to HE at Writtle and elsewhere above the 2013/14 baseline value of 25%. The College has set a long term goal of ensuring the over 35% of eligible Level 3 learners successfully enter HE.
2. **Recruitment from areas of low participation.** In terms of the proportion of our student body drawn from areas of relative deprivation, we intend to maintain the percentage identified in NS-SEC 4-7 tables (HESA table 1a) at above 39% and grow this to 44.5% by 2019/20.
3. **Recruitment of students from a black ethnic minority background.** The proportion of the HE student body drawn from black and ethnic minority groups should be substantially greater than the proportion of black and ethnic minority groups in the regional population from which the College draws many of its students. This currently stands at approximately 3.6% (regional and local population census data). The College will endeavour to 1) maintain the proportion of black and ethnic minority students above 15% and 2) to increase this to 18% by 2019/20.
4. **Recruitment of students recruited with a declared disability.** To maintain the proportion of HE students who declare a disability at 17% and increase this to 20% by 2019/20 (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e).
5. **Recruitment of mature students aged 21+ .** To maintain the proportion of HE students aged 21+ at 40% or greater. Prior to 2009 well over 50% of students studying at the College were aged 21+. This has decreased steadily, reflecting in part changes in the portfolio of programmes offered by the College and changes to the funding available to students who already hold a degree level qualification. The College wishes to maintain a diversity of students and has set the ambitious target of maintaining the proportion of its students age 21+ above 40%. This reflects the importance the College places on mature students and the potential impact and opportunities HE can provide mature students⁴.
6. **Recruitment of part-time students.** Following the introduction of the new fee regime in 2012, the College has seen a decrease in part-time study, particularly among mature students. For the academic year 2014/15, approximately 3% of home undergraduate students are part-time. The College believes that appropriately structured part-time study linked to flexible modes of full time delivery can provide a valuable means of access to HE

⁴ <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/PowerOfPartTimeExecutiveSummary.pdf>

for many non-traditional students who would not otherwise enter HE. The college aims to grow its PT enrolment to at least 5% of home students.

7. **Student Success** The existing target for full-time home-region undergraduates was that 'non-completion' should be less than 10% for each academic year, dropping to 7% by 2016/17. Based on 2012/13 HESA data (Table T3a), for full time first degree students the non-completion rate was 8.5% for young entrants, 3.8% for mature entrants and at 7.2% for all first degree entrants close to the sector average of 7.0%. For the period 2016 to 2020, the College aspires to reduce the non-completion rate further, so that its performance for this measure is within the top 40% of English HEIs. To achieve this, the College will aim to reduce the overall non-completion rate to 5% by 2019/2020. Based on the HESA 2012/13 baseline figures the College would need to reduce the overall non-completion rate from 7.2 to 5.8% to be within the best performing 40% of institutions in England.

Outreach and Collaborative Targets.

8. To sustain our education outreach activity (in terms of volume and variety) at the high level attained in previous years, to deliver at least 30 events benefiting 5,000 participants annually.
9. Within our outreach activities to run at least 10 activities that target and are designed to raise aspiration and participation among learner from regional 'cold-spot' low-participation neighbourhoods identified by HEFCE.⁵
10. Within our outreach activities to run at least 5 activities that promote and support the take up of higher education by part-time students and mature return to learning students.

Institutional Monitoring Arrangements

Development, coordination and implementation of the Access Agreements is overseen by the Access Group. The VP (Academic) will continue to 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 VP (Academic) with input from all the departments, 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

⁵ www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/coldspots/

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 are directly and formally involved in the development, approval and implementation of the access measures through their membership of the College Student Union Liaison Group, and the Access Group. Students were extensively consulted through 2011/12 as the College prepared for the changes 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 fee-levels and access package were debated at the College Student Union Liaison Group. The agreed fee of £9000 and along with other access and retention measures was endorsed by the SU representatives. This Access Agreement, which builds on those of previous years, has been developed in consultation with the SU, who have been instrumental in shaping the financial support offered by the College.

Equality Issues

This Access Agreement has been subject to discussion and scrutiny by member of the College Equality and Diversity Group. 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* 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.