

## **WRITTLER COLLEGE**

### **ACCESS AGREEMENT 2015/16**

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 aspires 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 2015 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 years in 2015. 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 in 2016/17 if the permitted maximum is increased.

### **EXPENDITURE ON ADDITIONAL ACCESS MEASURES**

The College will continue to allocate approximately 30% 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 2015/16, the College forecasts the total Ofpa accountable funding allocated to these measures will be £698,000 (i.e. 30% of the estimated higher fee income). Under previous Access Agreements around 50% of this has been used to provide financial support, the remainder being allocated approximately equally to support and fund outreach and student success measures.

Under the current Access Agreement planned expenditure for student financial support has been reduced and the nature of this support diversified, with the introduction of bursaries designed to promote student success, progression and employability.

In 2015/16 the College anticipates sending on additional access, student success and progression measures:

- £293,000 on financial support for students.
- £185,000 on a range of outreach and access activities targeted at under-represented groups.
- £220,000 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 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 pro-rata basis.

The following additional bursaries will be available to students within our access target groups who are able to demonstrate hardship. We have taken 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.
6. 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 first two years of study, 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.

## STRATEGIC APPROACH

The College welcomes the publication of a *National strategy for access and student success in higher Education*<sup>1</sup>. which will help to inform and direct refinement and development of the College's approach to student access and success. To successfully promote student participation and improve retention and achievement the College has consciously adopted a balanced suite of interventions and outreach activities aimed at supporting the student throughout their entire student lifecycle. To achieve this, an integrated institution-wide approach has been adopted that bridges the FE and HE divide, involving all departments that support HE students and FE learners.

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 to HE are not confined to Writtle College students or designed solely to support internal progression. The College is working with regional colleges and schools, including junior schools, to raise aspirations and promote HE.

In accordance with the recently published research<sup>2</sup> on the impact of bursaries on access, student retention and progression and our own experience, the College will place greater emphasis and expenditure on activities associated with outreach and measures to improve student opportunities and performance. However, we 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.

The College has identified the following priority groups to target in 2015/16:

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

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<sup>1</sup> *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*. BIS April 2014

<sup>2</sup> *An interim report: Do bursaries have an effect on retention rates*. Ofpa March 2014

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

In addition to the measures designed to support these priority student groups the College will also increase its existing activities and measures designed to improve the retention and employability of Foundation Degrees students and students entering HE with an Access to HE Diploma or full Level 3 Diploma qualifications. In 2013/14 approximately 57% of our students entered higher education at Writtle College with non 'A'-level qualifications, 10.2% were studying for a Foundation Degree. Research has shown that, within this group, achievement and retention is often is poor and individuals from low income groups and low participation neighbourhoods are disproportionately high<sup>3</sup>. Because of this the College will be developing actions to specifically improve the retention and success of these students and will look to modify its targets in 2016 to reflect this.

Throughout 2014/15, following the establishment in Autumn 2013 of an 'Access Group', the College has continued to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of measures aimed at improving access, retention and achievement. The Group, chaired by the Head of Higher Education, includes the Director of Academic Standards, Head of Learning & Teaching, Deputy Head of Further Education, Head of Registry, Heads of Schools, and representatives from the Students' Union, Finance, and Marketing. Meeting at least three times yearly, its remit it to evaluate all aspects of access, from our promotion of access to HE generally, thorough 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 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, 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.

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<sup>3</sup> *Hefce* April 2010/12 – Foundation degrees. Key statistics 2001-2 to 2009-10  
Waite S., Scott-Ward, R., & L. Greening (2011) Bridging the Divide. Study of National Diploma students progressing into HE. Short report of EKEN project: <http://www.1419eken.org/projects.html>  
Greening, L. Scott-Ward, R. & Waite, S. (2012). *The perceived challenges of the first year of a foundation degree; learning from those who have*. Poster presentation. Open University Widening Participation Conference: Discourses of Inclusion in Higher Education. Northamptonshire, April, 2012.

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, 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 following a range of progression-oriented outreach activities delivered by HE, FE, and support staff. In future years the College will aim to increase this proportion, with a long-term target of 30% of eligible 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. 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.
4. 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. As part of its strategy to support mature and 'return to learning' students the College validated and offered for the first time during 2014, Access to Higher Education Diploma programmes.
5. We will also 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.

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 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 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.

5. 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 reflects the distinctive nature of our portfolio and curricula. However, building on the initiatives begun during 2014/15 the Access Group will explore ways to develop the range and extent of collaboration with other providers of higher education.

Expenditure on outreach and access work targeted at under-represented groups reflects the cost of materials and staff time devoted to 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 HE population of whom 10.3% of young full-time first degree entrants are identified as being from low participation neighbourhoods (HESA data), around 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 13.7% receive discretionary learner support (an income-based measure) and 22.9% have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (Writtle FE student data).

### **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 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 offer a comprehensive range of Learner Services that enable Higher Education students to succeed on their chosen programmes.
3. 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).
4. 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.
5. 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.

6. We will continue our 'Open Door' policy of ad hoc tutorials and student support from lecturing staff.
7. A range of 'workshop' sessions and events will be delivered to support and promote student employment and progression to post graduate studies.
8. We will increase the opportunities for students to gain additional work and practical vocational skills to help support 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. 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 its Equality and Diversity Group as a key instrument to monitor and assess progress as well as to recommend relevant measures. The intentional cross membership of the Equality and Diversity Group with the Access Group ensures that potential equality and diversity impacts of measures are considered during their development and evaluated once implemented.

- In Autumn 2013 10% of our eligible level 3 Further Education completers progressed to HE courses at Writtle College. This is an increase of approximately 3.8% on the figure for 2012. In addition the total proportion of eligible Level 3 Writtle students progressing onto HE has also increased. This suggests that the internal outreach and access activities undertaken by the College have been effective in increasing the aspiration of our FE learners and supported them in their transition to HE.
- Black and ethnic minority students comprised 14.4% of the Higher Education student body in 2013/14. This figure is slightly higher than previous years.
- In 2013/14 approximate 17.20% of our Higher Education students had a disability. This represents an increase of 1.2% on the previous year.
- In 2013/14 around 35% of our students were aged 21+. This is slightly higher than in the previous year, but a considerable reduction on 2009/10 and earlier. In part this reflects the on-going impact of ELQ funding arrangements which has meant a reduction in mature, degree-qualified, applicants to Writtle (especially in Horticulture) which has altered our age demographic. In addition there is increasing anecdotal evidence that interest in, and applications from mature students wishing to study the subject areas offered by the College as part-time students have declined since the introduction of the new fee regime.



- 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 2012/13 11.7% of our full-time home-region undergraduates were ‘non-completers’ (HESA11 data). This figure has not changed substantially from the previous year. Analysis of the available data suggests that completion rates are lower among entrants on Foundation Degrees, and among those with non-traditional entry qualifications. 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**

With the exception of the proportion of Writtle FE students progressing to higher education, the College has decided for the present to retain its existing milestones. It will review the appropriateness of these as more evidence accumulates on national patterns and the impact of its access measures and the removal of the National Scholarship Programme and related changes.

Currently the targets and milestones linked to FE student progression relate specifically to the numbers of Writtle College FE student progressing internally to higher education. This measure of success is too restrictive. It does not allow the College to fully evaluate the effectiveness of interventions designed to raise aspiration and FE to HE progression. Some FE learners will progress to HE at other intuitions. From 2015/16 the College intends to record and set targets based on the total proportion of eligible level 3 FE students from Writtle who progress on to higher education, whether this is at the College or elsewhere.

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. Beyond 2015/16 to increase, and maintain, the total percentage of eligible Writtle College FE students progressing to HE at Writtle and elsewhere above the 2012 baseline values of 25%.
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**

Development, coordination and implementation of the Access Agreements is overseen by the Access Group. 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, 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 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 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.

**Access agreement 2015-16 resource plan (submission 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014)**  
**(Table 7) Targets and milestones**

**Institution name: Writtle College**

**Institution UKPRN: 10007657**

**Table 7a** - Statistical targets and milestones relating to your applicants, entrants or student body

Number	Please select target type from the drop-down menu	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target?	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
						2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	
1	HESA T1c - NS-SEC classes 4-7 (Young, full-time, other undergraduate entrants)	Students from postcode areas associated with relative deprivation - To grow the percentage of students identified in NS-SEC 4-7 from 38% to 39% by 2015-16.	No	2009-10	38%	38%	39%	39%			
2	Other statistic - Other (please give details in the next column)	To maintain the proportion of our Higher Education Students who are disabled at 10% or greater. (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	No	2009-10	14.7%	15%	15%	15%			
3	Other statistic - Other (please give details in the next column)	The proportion of our Higher Education student body drawn from black and ethnic minority groups should be no less than 10% (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	No	2009-10	10.2%	10%	10%	10%			
4	Other statistic - Mature (please give details in the next column)	To maintain the proportion of our Higher Education students aged 21+ at 50% or greater. (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	No	2009-10	63.4%	57%	57%	57%			
5	Other statistic - Completion/Non continuation (please give details in the next column)	Non-completion for full-time home-region students should be less than 10% for academic year 2012/13, dropping to 7% by academic year 2016/17	No	2009-10	15%	8%	7%	7%			
6	Other statistic - Other (please give details in the next column)	15% of our eligible FE level 3 completers should progress to our Higher Education Courses in 2012/13, rising to 20% in 2016/17. (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	No	2009-10	12.7%	17%	18%	20%			

**Notes**

Alongside applicant and entrant targets, we encourage you to provide targets around outreach and student success work (including collaborative work where appropriate) or other initiatives to illustrate your progress towards increasing access, student success and progression. These should be measurable outcomes-based targets and should focus on the number of beneficiaries reached by a particular activity/programme or the number of schools worked with, and what the outcomes were, rather than simply recording the nature/number of activities.

**Table 7b** - Other milestones and targets.

Number	Please select target type from the drop-down menu	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target?	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
						2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	
1	Mission targets	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 benefitting 5,000 participants annually.	Yes	2009-10	30 events	30 events	30 events	30 events			

**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.