BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2013-14

1. Fee Levels

    We are proposing that fees will be set at one of four fee points, as indicated below. These represent the maximum fee that will be charged for these subjects at each fee point.

    £6,000
    All HND, HNC and Foundation degrees.

    £7,500
    Full time first degrees in Business and Management; Sociology; Early Childhood Education Studies; Computing, Information and Communication Technology; Architectural Technology; Property, Construction and Planning; English: Health and Social Care,(other than those courses delivered under the NHS contract).

    £8,200
    Full time first degrees in Art and Design; Architecture; Law; Engineering; Digital Media Technology; Engineering Design and Manufacturing Systems; Psychology; Criminology; Media and Communication; Community Theatre.

    £9,000
    Jewellery; Music; Acting; Stage Management; Initial Teacher Training

    Where a full-time undergraduate student opts to extend the normal length of a Bachelor's degree by an additional year in order to take a full-year work placement there will be no fee for the additional placement year.

    The fees for part time courses have been set pro rata to full time courses. Under these arrangements no part time student will be charged more than £6,750.

    The fee set for entrants will apply to them for the duration of their studies. Fees will be subject to an annual inflationary increase, where allowed by the Government.

    The fee set for technology based programmes is based on the assumption that Funding Council financial support for this strategic subject will continue. If this funding is removed then the fee will be set at £9,000 as this is a high delivery cost subject.

2. Expenditure

    Birmingham City University performs exceptionally well both in absolute terms and by comparison to the adjusted sector benchmark in indicators of widening participation. Examination of the HESA performance indicators for 2010-11 reveals:

    - for young full-time undergraduate entrants
        - 97.5% from state schools or colleges (above benchmark)
        - 41.7% from NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6 & 7 (significantly above benchmark)
        - 13.8% from low participation neighbourhoods (above benchmark)

- for mature full-time undergraduate entrants
  - 13.1% with no previous HE qualification and from low participation neighbourhoods (above benchmark)
- for part time undergraduate entrants
  - 2.1% of entrants with no previous HE qualification and from low participation neighbourhoods (at benchmark)

Indicators of retention reveal the following:

- non-continuation following year of entry
  - a further trend of a reduction in non-continuation, which at 8.1% is now better than both the sector-adjusted benchmark of 10.6% and the UK mean of 8.6%
  - within the above, the University performs significantly better than benchmark in the proportion of young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods who do not continue in HE: at 6.8%, compared to 11.4% for the sector adjusted benchmark and 9.9% for the UK average
  - non-continuation of mature full-time entrants is now better than benchmark for those pursuing first degrees (at 9.0% for those without a previous HE qualification it is significantly better than the benchmark of 13.5% and the UK average of 13.8%, and at 11.9% for those with a prior HE qualification it is better than the 12.4% benchmark and the UK average of 12.2%)
  - performance of all categories of entrant to other undergraduate programmes is better than benchmark and better than the UK average

- projected learning outcome
  - the proportion of full-time first degree entrants projected for neither award nor transfer at 17.2% is higher than the adjusted sector benchmark at 16.6% and the UK average of 13.1% but represents a further improvement.

Our evaluation of performance in relation to access and retention is that we have a demonstrable record of achievement in relation to widening access and have shown recent solid progress in relation to first-year retention. However, analysis of the indicators demonstrates that the University still needs to acquire a greater understanding of the causes of poor progression and completion after the first year and that the focus of our access agreement expenditure should be upon the provision of tailored investment to support retention and success in achieving an award.

We therefore intend to commit approximately 15% of additional fee income (10% for postgraduate ITT students), for countable expenditure on additional access and retention measures. This will include our National Scholarship Programme match funding, continuation of the regional collaborative activity that has replaced the Aim Higher Scheme, University outreach activity and new activities to increase and support student retention, progression and achievement. We intend to continue expenditure on maintaining sector adjusted benchmark for the participation of students in receipt of disabled students' allowance and we will meet all bursary commitments for continuing students.

The University's Equality and Diversity Committee receives regular reports on the participation, retention, achievement and destinations and the findings from these reports have been taken into account when compiling this Access Agreement.

2.1   Access

2.1.1. Financial Support

National Scholarship Programme

Our provisional allocation from HEFCE is for £981,000. This will provide 327 scholarships to the value of £3,000 per scholarship offered as a fee waiver to first year students. Eligible part time students will receive a pro rata fee waiver. These will be offered as a fee waiver.

The University consistently attracts more students per year from a family income background of £25,000 or less than will be able to receive a scholarship. Therefore, additional criteria of a lower family income background (currently set at £16,190) and demonstration of excellence in academic achievement, performance or potential will be used to select scholarship beneficiaries.

The University will match this allocation with a further £981,000 which will be offered as a fee waiver to eligible new system students using the same additional criteria as above.

2.1.2. Outreach

Birmingham City University has always been committed to delivering and participating in outreach activities. The University's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment contains further information on these and the other widening participation activities undertaken.

The University consistently performs above widening participation benchmarks, particularly against the state school and social class indicators. The proportion of students from Black and other Minority Ethnic backgrounds is high and remains one of the highest of any institution outside London. The proportion of mature students is high, although this has fallen somewhat over recent years.

We will undertake activities to maintain our performance at or above the sector adjusted benchmark in relation to entrants from state education, social class and low participation neighbourhoods. The types of activities will include subject enrichment workshops, master classes, campus visits, one-to-one surgeries giving advice on UCAS applications, attendance at parents' evenings and careers fairs, talks on student finance and what to expect at university, and conferences for college students and their advisors.

The outreach team will provide organisational support, previously funded by HEFCE, for activities initiated by the successor body to Aimhigher and continue to work closely with key feeder schools and colleges in communities with low participation rates to raise aspirations and encourage applications to higher education. Our evidence demonstrates that learners in such

environments, when offered a range of targeted activities, are much more likely to consider higher education as a realistic option.

The overall rise in applicants to the University between 2009/10 and 2011/12 was 1.6%. Analysis shows higher than average increases in applications from those feeder institutions where significant outreach activity has taken place. These institutions are all located in areas with low rates of participation in higher education. Examples include:

- Walsall College applications increased from 184 in 2009 to 325 in 2011 (76% increase)
- Dudley College applications increased from 275 to 286 (4%)
- Broadway School applications increased from 34 to 39 (15%)
- Cadbury Sixth Form College applications increased from 188 to 219 (16%)
- Sandwell Academy applications increased from 61 to 72 (18%).

Monitoring and evaluation of outreach activities will be undertaken through a range of methods, including:

- Tracking learners who take part in intensive activities such as mentoring and master classes to monitor applications and progression to the University.
- Carrying out a sample of pre and post- event evaluations to monitor attitudinal shift and effectiveness.

The indicator relating to the recruitment of students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance has in the past shown the University performing below benchmark. While the percentage of students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance has risen consistently year on year in the student populations analysed, this trend has been matched by a corresponding increase in the benchmark. The University proposed to improve the participation of students with disabilities to match or exceed benchmark and the most recent figures suggest that the University has exceeded benchmark for full time and part time undergraduates for a second year. We will continue to devote resource to enable us to maintain this position.

2.1.3. Collaborative working between institutions

Birmingham City University will continue the collaborative partnership established in 2011-12 with the University of Birmingham, Aston University and University College Birmingham to take forward the legacy Aimhigher. The partnership has established itself and exceeded its baseline year targets, having engaged over 500 disadvantaged young people from more than 50 schools.

Going forward, the partnership will sharpen its focus on learners in Years 9 to 11, and seek to consolidate established links with 20 schools to deliver activities in an intensive and coherent programme in line with the Learner Progression Framework. The partnership will also deliver less intensive activities to a larger numbers of young people in response to demand from schools.

Birmingham City University will jointly fund this with a contribution of £35,000 in 2012-13 and 2013-14 and will continue to be intimately involved in its governance and management. Opportunities to engage other HEIs in elements of the Aimhigher programme will be pursued, as will opportunities to align with and sustain other relevant initiatives. These partnership activities will complement Birmingham City University's own extensive programme of widening access and fair access measures outlined elsewhere in this agreement.

The partnership has been developing a comprehensive impact and evaluation plan which will monitor student engagement with partnership activities, track the progression of those learners with whom the partnership works most closely, evaluate the overall effectiveness of the partnership activity and disseminate good practice. Evaluation will include both quantitative and qualitative measures and will provide evidence to partner HEIs and schools engaged in the programme.

During 2011/12 the partnership has obtained data from UCAS, DfE and several local authorities to allow it to populate baselines and improvement targets. The partnership is also on track to achieve its short term target of engaging 500 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by the end of the current year.

2.2. Retention

Senate adopted in 2011 recommendations from a Senate working group on retention, progression and achievement. These recommendations included target setting for key measures at both institutional and programme level. A range of targets are now being set at institutional level for a set of key measures around progression and employment, these also being reflected locally in programme level targets. We have already seen quite significant improvement in non-continuation following year of entry for full time first degree entrants as indicated above.

An Action Plan includes developments aimed at improving support for transition into Higher Education and stimulating student engagement with their learning. Progress will be monitored at the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee, a sub-committee of Senate, as part of the annual monitoring process.

These developments are being led in a new project "Partners for Success" which will take forward the work on Redesign of the Learning Experience (RoLEx) and provide a specific focus on retention, progression and achievement as well as developing employability and supporting graduates into jobs.

The Student Academic Partners scheme has now been expanded and through participation in Change Academy, sponsored by the HEA and Leadership Foundation, the university is seeking to generate a wide range of employment opportunities for students on campus. This initiative has also included the development and piloting of a Student Academic Mentors Scheme in 2011/12; the scheme will be evaluated, refined and expanded in subsequent years

3. Monitoring and evaluation

All data relating to student participation, retention and progression are routinely reported to the University's Senate. Progress against the milestones set out in this agreement will be monitored by Senate, which already monitors progress against, and reviews the action plan of, the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment, which is also reported to HEFCE as part of the institution's annual monitoring.

The Students' Union has sabbatical officer membership of the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee, which will be monitoring progress against the action plans for progression and retention, and of Senate, which will be monitoring progress against the milestones set out in this Access Agreement.

4. Student communications

4.1 Consulting with students

Prior to completing and submitting our Access Agreement for 2012-13 the University consulted widely on the fees and National Scholarship criteria to be introduced. This consultation included discussions at the Board of Governors, whose membership includes the Students' Union President; the University Senate, which has Student Union sabbatical representation, and the Corporate Management Group, of which the Students' Union General Manager is a member.

The University Directorate also held a meeting with the Students' Union sabbatical team and the Vice-Chancellor held a separate meeting with the President of the Students' Union.

The Vice-Chancellor attended an open student question and answer session, held before the Students' Union AGM, to explain the University's approach to fee setting for 2012 and answer questions both about that process and about the agreed fee levels. This has become an annual event, with the Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) attending the meeting in 2012.

The Students' Union General Manager is a member of the University working group on the National Scholarship Programme, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience).

The Students' Union attends separate, regular monthly meetings with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and prior to the submission of the 2012-13 Access agreement both fee setting and National Scholarship criteria were discussed.

Both parties are in agreement that the fee setting process was fair, transparent and consultative and the Students' Union has not challenged either the process or the outcome. There was, and continues to be, a difference of opinion about the National Scholarship Programme; both parties are in agreement over the additional criteria introduced by the University in order to target the scholarships more specifically. However, the Union would wish to see the scholarships awarded as cash to support living costs rather than fee waivers.

4.2 Communication/information to prospective students

Clear, accessible and timely information on fees, loans, bursaries and scholarships will be provided to applicants and students in the following ways:

Outreach Activities

Outreach staff, student mentors, student ambassadors and 'BCU Choices' staff will provide information on fees, loans, grants, scholarships and bursaries as part of their outreach activity.

University web site

The web site will give comprehensive information about course fees, aggregate fees, the scholarship scheme, bursaries, loans and grants and the Access to Learning Fund and other financial support available to students. Clarification of any additional course costs will be provided and an indication of accommodation costs will also be available.

Essential Guide

The Essential guide contains links to the BCU website and Student Services website so information on fees and financial support will be signposted.

Open Days and Visit Days

Staff from the University's Education Liaison Team and Student Services give Open Day talks and provide information on fees and financial support to prospective students, applicants and their families.

These specialist staff provide current information for faculty based visit days and events.

Student Services Web Site

The Student Services web site gives information about all financial support available to students and includes a budget-balancing student calculator.

Tuition Fees and Funding leaflet

The leaflet will give an overview of current fees, with reference to detailed fee information on the University web site. It also contains information about all aspects of financial support available to students.

Student Services Money Matters leaflet

This leaflet outlines the financial support services offered, has a frequently asked questions section, gives information on how to contact the Student Finance Advisors and how to apply for financial assistance.

The University is committed to providing such timely information to UCAS and SLC as they reasonably require to populate their applicant facing web services.