

# **BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY**

## **ACCESS AGREEMENT 2016-17**

### 1. **Fee Levels**

Evidence suggests that young full-time applicants, even those from disadvantaged or low-income groups, have not been deterred by the higher fees and that applicants will not allow fee levels to compromise their choice of course (Higher Education Policy Institute October 2013) . Indeed, it has been found that the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2012 was not associated with any substantial changes in applicant course choices or any change in the share of applications for live-at-home study (UCAS July 2012).

Following a range of policy changes and the potential of future cuts which may occur after the General Election in May 2015, it is highly likely that there will be much less funding available to support outreach activity, widening participation, support for student retention and progression and support for student hardship, all of which are critical elements to the nature of our student profile and indeed mission as an inclusive University. Furthermore, the proposed changes to the Disabled Students' Allowances will necessitate the University itself having to provide additional support to disabled students to ensure that they are not unduly disadvantaged.

The decision has, therefore, been taken to maintain a standard fee of £9,000 for all full-time first-degree programmes and interim awards such as DipHEs for 2016-17 entry, in order to enable the University to protect the student experience. It should be noted that, depending upon the level of the funding cut in 2016-17, much of the additional income to the University that year from fees will merely replace the income lost from other forms of funding.

All HND, HNC and Foundation degrees will remain at the previous fee of up to £6,000.

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 may be subject to an annual inflationary increase, if allowed by the Government.

### 2. **Performance and Expenditure**

Birmingham City University performs 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 2013-14 reveals:

- for young full-time undergraduate entrants
  - 97.4% from state schools or colleges (above the benchmark of 95.3%)

- 45.2% from NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6 & 7 (significantly above the benchmark of 39.9%)
- 12.7% from low participation neighbourhoods (just below the benchmark of 13.3%)
- for mature full-time undergraduate entrants
  - 11.9% with no previous HE qualification and from low participation neighbourhoods (just below the benchmark of 12.3%)
- for part time undergraduate entrants
  - 1.7% of entrants with no previous HE qualification and from low participation neighbourhoods (matching the benchmark of 1.7%)

Indicators of student success reveal the following:

- non-continuation following year of entry
  - a non-continuation rate of full-time first degree entrants of 7.8% which is better than the sector-adjusted benchmark of 8.8%
  - within the above, the University has improved its performance in the proportion of young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods who do not continue in HE, now meeting the sector benchmark at 8.7%.
  - non-continuation of mature full-time entrants remains better than benchmark for those pursuing first degrees (at 10.7% for those without a previous HE qualification it is better than the benchmark of 11.7% and UK average of 12.7%, and at 10.3% for those with a prior HE qualification it is better than the 10.5% benchmark and the UK average of 10.6%)
- projected learning outcome
  - the proportion of full-time first degree entrants projected for neither award nor transfer has improved further to 10.7% and is now 1.9% better than the adjusted sector benchmark
  - 79.1% of full-time first degree entrants projected to receive a degree, compared to a benchmark figure of 78.5. This has improved significantly since last year's projection of 78.2%.

The University has now further mainstreamed the monitoring of Equality and Diversity by moving from a separate committee (a sub-committee of Academic Board until July 2014) and instead having it even more embedded into University business with equality and diversity now being monitored by the Student Experience, Learning and Teaching committee, which maintains an overview of the University's performance with regards to improving student success. It receives a range of student statistical analyses to explore possible significant relationships which may exist between student performance and the various 'protected characteristics' identified under the Equality Act 2010 for which data is held (age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief and race/ethnicity). During 2013/14, the analyses covered the following areas:

- participation – examination of levels of diversity within enrolment to University programmes;
- retention – examination of retention rates of new entrants continuing their studies at the University;

- progression – measuring the completion of all study within the expected time-span for their programme;
- achievement – examination of the variation of First Degree classifications;
- employability – examination of responses to the six month Destination of Leavers from HE survey.

Additional factors including entry qualification and subject area were included in the analysis as these have been shown at sector level to be significant factors in understanding student performance. Where significant relationships were discovered, these were highlighted and recommendations made for action or further investigation. The key significant findings for monitoring of students with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and for whom data was available, showed a correlation, consistent in at least the last four reporting cycles, between:

- Ethnicity and achievement (degree classification); and
- Age and efficient progression (that is, progress without interruption or repeated years).

On the basis of the above findings, the Equality and Diversity committee focused two of its five 'Priority Actions for 2014-15' on tackling student outcomes, progression and retention rates. These priority actions feature in the 2014 annual Equality and Diversity report, approved by the Board of Governors, are to:

- Embed awareness of equality and diversity issues in Faculties and Departments with particular attention to reducing the attainment gap between BME and White students and improving the retention and progression rates of mature students; and
- Encourage a wide range of inclusive Teaching and Learning practice across the Institution as a tool for improving student outcomes.

The findings of the Equality and Diversity Committee have been taken into account when compiling this Access Agreement.

Our evaluation of performance in relation to access and student success is that we have a demonstrable record of achievement in relation to widening access. The focus of our access agreement expenditure will remain upon the provision of tailored investment to support retention and success in achieving an award along with maintaining the increased level of expenditure on outreach activities.

We therefore intend to commit approximately 15% of additional fee income (10% for postgraduate ITT students), for countable expenditure on additional access and student success measures. This will include continuation of existing regional collaborative activity that will form part of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach initiative, University outreach activity, continuation of existing activities that have had a positive impact on increasing and supporting student retention, progression and achievement, as well as new activities to meet the same goals. We intend to continue expenditure on meeting the sector adjusted benchmark for the participation of students in receipt of the disabled students' allowance, as well as to support those who may no longer be eligible after the proposed changes have been implemented, and we will meet all bursary commitments for continuing students.

## 2.1 Access

### 2.1.1. Financial Support

With the absorption of the Access to Learning Fund (ALF) into the Student Opportunity Fund, the University will continue to support students suffering hardship to at least the level previously funded by ALF. However, dependent upon the specific nature of the cases and applications received for hardship funding, the University may choose to augment this sum and provide additional funding. Indeed, in previous years the University received, and had cause to commit to students suffering hardship, significantly higher sums from ALF than was received in the most recent ALF allocation, demonstrating evidence of need beyond that which had been funded.

### 2.1.2. Outreach

Birmingham City University has always been committed to delivering and participating in outreach activities. The most recent institutional performance indicators have shown that the University continues to perform above benchmark in recruiting young First Degree students from state run schools and low income households.

Many of the advice and guidance activities undertaken by the University's outreach team, including our generic ones, automatically capture disadvantaged learners. Our main catchment areas include a high proportion of learners from a widening participation background. Research from the Birmingham and Solihull Aimhigher partnership shows that 66% of the schools and colleges in the Birmingham and Solihull area fall into the higher category of institutions within a particular widening participation classification in comparison with 29% nationally. This ranking considers the proportion of targeted learners in those institutions who fall within a widening participation classification using a range of Indicators, such as eligibility for free schools meals, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (N-SEC 4-8), and no parental engagement in HE. However, the majority of the University's top ten feeder institutions are classed under this ranking by Aimhigher as 'High Priority', and there has been a further overall increase in applications to Birmingham City University from the 'High Priority' feeder institutions compared to 2013.

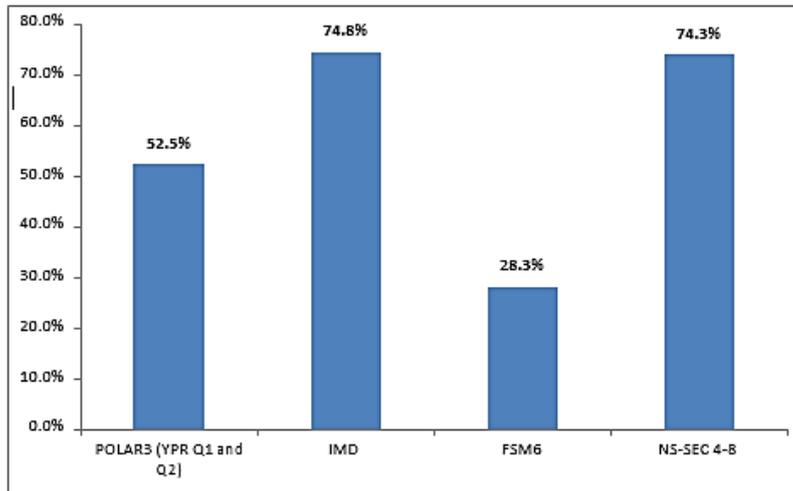
In July 2014, as part of the Aimhigher partnership, Birmingham City University ran a non-residential summer school for 26 year 13s, all of whom met the Aimhigher targeting criteria, with the theme of the summer school being transition from school to Higher Education. 77% of the 13 respondents to the survey agreed that it had improved their study skills, 54% that it had improved their aspirations for the future, and 77% that it had improved their confidence in their academic ability.

Overall a report on the outreach activity delivery for 2013/14 showed that the team engaged with 111 schools, providing 306 activities, and interacted with over 32,000 beneficiaries.

Data gathered and research done by Aimhigher as shown in the table below demonstrates that the Outreach team activities benefitted a high percentage of learners that fall into the widening participation cohort based on a range of measures as indicated previously.

## All Activities

Criteria	Number target	% target	Number not target	Unknown	Total Known
POLAR3 (YPR Q1 and Q2)	6819	52.5%	6177	18877	12996
IMD	9725	74.8%	3279	18869	13004
FSM6	2417	28.3%	6137	23319	8554
NS-SEC 4-8	9489	74.3%	3279	19105	12768



Birmingham City University's outreach team works closely with key feeder schools and colleges in communities with low participation rates to raise aspirations and encourage applications to higher education. We intend to continue to offer a comprehensive range of activities, which include subject enrichment workshops, subject-based 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.

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.

Going forward the University is forging stronger relationships with key partner schools and colleges, and as part of these partnerships will be offering targeted advice and guidance to potential students from a widening participation background. These groups of learners will be supported in a sustained way through the research and application process and transition to University. Learners will be selected on the basis of need and will include mature learners and looked after children.

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.

It should be noted that the tracking of student data can be problematic as it requires parental consent so data capture is not always comprehensive. Since outreach activities are targeted at various age groups, there is often a delay before application or conversion analysis can be completed.

The indicator relating to the recruitment of students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance has risen consistently over the past three years, although the trend was mirrored by a corresponding increase in the benchmark. The University is improving particularly quickly in recruiting full-time first degree students, moving from 5.8% in 2011-12 to 6.8% in 2013-14 (compared to a benchmark increase from 7.1% to 7.7%). We will continue to devote resource to enable us to improve this position.

### 2.1.3. Collaborative working between institutions

Birmingham City University will continue the collaborative Aimhigher West Midlands partnership, which was established in 2011/12 with the University of Birmingham, Aston University and University College Birmingham, and in 2016/17 will extend to include The University of Worcester.

The partnership met its yearly milestones in 2013/14 and is on course to do so again in 2014/ 15. We therefore confirm our intention to engage 1,000 disadvantaged young people in Aimhigher's intensive activity in each year from 2015/16 to 2019/20, and to increase the number and geographical range of the schools we work with. Birmingham City University will jointly fund Aimhigher with a contribution of £35,000 in 2016/17 and will be intimately involved in its governance and management. The outreach activities delivered through the partnership will complement the University's own extensive programme of widening access and fair access measures outlined elsewhere in this agreement.

Our non-OFFA linked collaborative work to broker, coordinate and deliver outreach activities and events for higher education advice and guidance practitioners working to support the progression of disadvantaged young people will be greatly extended as a result of Aimhigher West Midlands' success in becoming part of the HEFCE-funded NNCO initiative.

Aimhigher West Midlands has a comprehensive evaluation strategy to monitor targeting, engagement, the progression of beneficiaries and the impact of Aimhigher on aspiration, attainment and progression to HE. This work has progressed to schedule via a PhD linked research project with the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Access. Large control and experimental groups span the 11-19 phase and include young people who meet all, some or no WP targeting criteria. Analysis to date suggests that engagement in Aimhigher during Key Stage 3 and 4 generates increased aspiration towards higher education (+12.5% above non-participants) and is associated with improved KS4 attainment (62.1% of learners engaged 6 times achieved 5 GCSEs at A\*-C (including English and maths) compared to a cohort average of 56%). Initial findings suggest the full-time HE application rate for the cohort of Aimhigher beneficiaries attaining the age of 18 or 19 during 2011/12 is higher (43.7%) than that for the local population of 18 and 19 year olds (30.6%). The partnership's ability to evaluate causality and impact in such detail is dependent on access to learner level data from schools, local authorities, DfE and UCAS. However, at the time of writing UCAS future policy on access to learner-level data is unclear and we are working with the HEAT initiative to overcome these risks.

## 2.2. Student Success

As reported in the Access Agreements for 2014-15 and 2015-16, the University is delivering a wide ranging initiative entitled 'Partners for Success'. This incorporates a comprehensive Project Plan, divided into four main categories: Target Setting; Admissions and Transition; Student Engagement and Support; and Employability and Employment. A Project Board has been formed to oversee the Partners for Success work and a Project Manager appointed to lead work in this area. Progress is monitored through reports to Academic Board and as part of annual monitoring at programme, faculty and central service level.

Partners for Success actions include:

- Extension of previous work on induction, transition and first year experience is now being designed and delivered. This includes:
  - Participation by programmes across six Schools in the second phase of the national 'What Works' Student Retention and Success initiative. This initiative sets out to develop and evaluate interventions aimed at enhancing a sense of belonging in participating students;
  - Extension of the *Level Up* online support initiative, delivered from the point of confirmation in 2012 in the School of Media across many Schools and programmes;
- Appointment of Student Success Advisors in all Faculties. These roles, piloted in one Faculty from 2013, are undertaken on a full-time basis by recent graduates and serve to provide a wide range of informal support and bridging between students and staff;
- Full support for students to ensure that they are able to develop and record achievement of employability attributes. This work will be delivered as part of a University wide development, across all years, of an Employability Framework. This will include support for CV development and mock interviews, individual portfolio construction, and a wider range of employer-driven work experience;
- A new integrated approach to Welcome Week delivering stronger induction to the wider University;
- Expansion of outreach work with key local FE providers;
- Successful initiatives in Student Academic Mentoring (40 projects funded in 2014-15) are being expanded across the institution, including exploration of the potential roles for senior students in providing personal tuition for junior students;
- Enhanced co-ordination of mentoring initiatives through the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching;
- Enhancement of the personal tutor role with developmental support for staff provided from the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching;
- Joint work with Birmingham City University Students' Union (BCUSU) seeking fuller roles for students in all aspects of curriculum design and delivery;
- Work in partnership with BCUSU to develop a full range of extracurricular activities aimed at enhancing employability;
- Encouragement of programme directors and other key programme teams to make better use of timely data on student performance, with early identification of those 'at risk';
- Adoption of a Careers Team approach that places emphasis on work located in faculties closer to curriculum delivery;
- Additional posts of Employment Adviser linked to each Faculty, dedicated to supporting students to achieve graduate-level employment or further study;

- Expansion of the University's student jobs scheme, OpportUNlty, to exploit fully the range of employment opportunities on campus and the benefits of such employment for students;
- Ensure for all students a work-related experience in each year of study;
- Entrepreneurship support to be available for all students and for three years after graduation.

The University is also planning to implement activity to reduce the 'hidden costs' of Higher Education, by providing targeted support to enable students to access course materials and books. The most recent Student Income & Expenditure Survey indicated that full-time students in 2011-12 spent on average £459 on direct course costs, whilst those studying courses in creative arts and education reported the highest expenditure (an average of £515). The University of East London has shown that there is a correlation between expenditure on course books and degree attainment, as students who achieved a first class degree spent on average £239 on books over the duration of their course, whilst those who achieved a third class degree spent just £146. Enabling students from a widening participation background to acquire course books and materials without causing additional financial hardship will therefore allow them to reach their full potential. Scoping work is currently underway to investigate how best to undertake this activity.

In addition to this, the University is supporting the Students' Union project, BCU Active. This is a Sport England/University funded widening participation project which provides students with the opportunity to take part in sport and physical activity. All the activities provided have coaches, equipment and transport provided for as low cost as possible to enable better access for hard-to-reach groups. The sessions are all focused around trying new activities and meeting new people in a fun, safe and friendly environment, helping to build support networks outside of the academic environment.

The University will also be submitting an expression of interest, in response to the HEFCE call (circular 04/2015) to pilot and evaluate measures of learning gain. This expression will most likely be collaborative in nature as we seek to work with and learn from colleagues at similar institutions to consider the 'distance travelled' by our students during their studies. This will include measures around student improvement in knowledge, skills, work readiness and personal development.

### 3. Monitoring and evaluation

Information about monitoring and evaluation against specific activities is included in the appropriate sections above.

We continue to adopt a focused approach, concentrating the resources available on outreach activities with evidence of success, whilst also seeking to analyse any issues associated with relationships which we perceive should be operating more effectively. The use of programme-level dashboard indicators is becoming embedded within the University, and we are continuing to review our approach to module-level evaluation and monitoring by developing 'self-service' dashboards to complement the sector-level ones being produced by HEFCE. Our planning process ensures integration and alignment of action planning, target setting and monitoring, budgeting and investment decisions with the University's Strategic Plan.

The University has processes in place to routinely monitor a range of indicators at specified, planned times during the year using sophisticated techniques which identify any statistically significant variation in performance related to the protected

characteristics, student profile and background. All data relating to student participation, retention and progression are routinely reported to the University's Academic Board. Progress against the milestones set out in this agreement will be monitored by Academic Board, 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 Academic Board, which will be monitoring progress against the milestones set out in this Access Agreement.

#### 4. Student communications

##### 4.1 Student Voice

A number of initiatives are under way aimed at enhancement of communication with students. The Students' Union President is a member of the Board of Governors, the University Executive Group and Academic Board and the Students' Union General Manager is a member of the University's Professional Services Group. The Students' Union President is also a member of the working group set up to formulate this Access Agreement.

As part of an HEA "Students as Partners" Change Initiative, BCUSU is delivering a Student Voice Project aimed at delivery of a range of outcomes to modernise the whole approach to capture of student views and enhancement of participation in University processes. One of these includes a reconstitution of the former Student Representation Coordination Group into a new Student Voice Group with wider representation and focus on delivery of the outcomes of the project. A new system of Feedback Forums is now established to replace and enhance the work of Boards of Studies, with a new Student Academic Leader role also replacing the former Course Representatives.

Students' Union officers and the Head of Membership Engagement continue to work closely with the Director of Learning Experience and the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching to optimise the student role in academic development.

##### 4.2 Communication/information to prospective and current students

Clear, accessible and timely information on fees, loans, bursaries and scholarships is provided to applicants and students in a variety of ways:

- outreach staff, student mentors, student ambassadors and the course enquiry team provide information on fees, loans, grants, scholarships and bursaries as part of their outreach activity;
- specialist staff give talks and provide information on fees and financial support to prospective students, applicants and their families at Open Days and Applicant Visit Days;
- the University is committed to providing such timely information to UCAS and SLC as they reasonably require to populate their applicant facing web services;
- the University's website provides comprehensive information about course fees, scholarship schemes, bursaries, loans and grants and other financial

support available to students. Guidance on additional course costs is provided together with an indication of accommodation costs. Visitors to the website can download a 'Money Matters' leaflet produced by Student Services which also acts as a gateway to other, more detailed information or can access the University's bespoke Student Calculator;

- our undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses contain information on finance and links to further, more detailed information. They are available either in a printed version or as a downloadable PDF from our website;
- the University's Student Services department employs specialist Student Finance Advisers and Student Help Zone Advisers to provide information, advice and guidance on a wide range of money matters. This includes information about the funding available, support with applications for hardship assistance and help with budgeting and debt management. Students can access this support in person via regular drop-in sessions or by appointment; by phone or email; or via various online channels including a comprehensive intranet site and an e-guidance service. A wide range of printed materials supports this work, together with an online funding portal which enables students to search for appropriate additional funding from external trusts and charities;
- the work of Student Services is complemented by the Students' Union Advice Centre which offers information, advice and representation on a wide range of issues including money. Its trained, experienced advisers are available by telephone, email or by appointment.

In 2015, the University became a corporate member of the Plain English Campaign to demonstrate its commitment to clearer communication to students and prospective students. Training in how to write in plain English is being made available to relevant staff, and student-facing information (including, but not limited to, policies and procedures, information related to courses and assessments, and guides to our services) has or will be reviewed in line with plain English principles.