

**Edge Hill  
University**

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**ACCESS  
AGREEMENT  
2016-2017**

**MAY 2015**

**‘Creating and Harnessing Knowledge to deliver Opportunity’**

**ACCESS AGREEMENT 2016-2017**

**1. Context**

Edge Hill University has been a champion of Widening Participation since its establishment in 1885 as the country’s first women’s non-denominational teacher training college. We have therefore always attracted and supported a diverse student body with the majority of our students coming from Widening Participation groups. The theme of *Opportunity for All* is thus central to the University’s Mission and, in order to effectively maximise the impact of our resources, it is crucial that, wherever possible, we mainstream our support for disadvantaged students as an integral element of our core business. We therefore take a strategic, whole institutional approach across the student journey wherever possible in order to deliver an outstanding, holistic student experience, enhancing achievement and progression.<sup>1</sup>

**1.1. Past Performance**

The results of this approach are demonstrated by:

- Consistent performance well above benchmark on all indicators for Widening Participation.
- A commitment to fair access at the heart of our Admissions Policy for many years, supporting the principles of the Schwarz Review and adopting good practice from the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) Programme.
- Working with the Frank Buttle Trust as one of the original partner universities to raise aspiration amongst Care Leavers.
- Offering highly successful Access programmes (Fastrack), providing alternative entry routes to a wide range of undergraduate provision including professional programmes in teaching and in health.
- Working in partnership with FE providers to deliver relevant, local HE provision, through alternative routes.

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<sup>1</sup> University Strategic Plan 2013 - 2020

- Significant year on year investment<sup>2</sup> in student facilities, creating one of the best campuses in the country and a continued commitment to invest in improved facilities.
- Continuous enhancement of and commitment to high quality support for students, which has been endorsed by students through the National Student Survey<sup>3</sup>, internal Student Satisfaction Surveys, and by external agencies through quality review processes<sup>4</sup>.
- Excellent employability outcomes, with 93.5% of first degree graduates in full time employment or further study, outperforming benchmark and the sector average.
- Ranked in the top 5 of 153 HEIs for improving social mobility through graduate outcomes.<sup>5</sup>
- Winning the award of the Times Higher Education 'University of the Year 2014/15' after being shortlisted an unprecedented four times since 2007.
- Being shortlisted for three THE Leadership and Management Awards in both 2014 and 2015 including Outstanding Admissions Team and Outstanding Registry Team.
- Hosting a Research Centre for Widening Participation which investigates, identifies and disseminates best practice in this area and has led on the recent reviews of the National Scholarship Programme

## 1.2 The External Environment

In developing this Agreement, we are mindful of the unprecedented levels of uncertainty likely to endure for the period it covers. We are alert to known demographic changes, particularly affecting the number of 18 years olds in the population and to the substantial changes in externally available funding, the impact of which needs careful consideration in assessing our future priorities; this particularly applies to the withdrawal of the National Scholarship Programme, the withdrawal of the Access to Learning Fund, changes in the availability of the Disabled Student Allowance and possible future reductions in Student Opportunity funding.

The individual and cumulative impact of the financial changes is to reduce the external funding available to support those students covered by this Agreement. We are also alert to the potential impact of the lifting of the student number cap and to the implications of School Direct on the recruitment to Teacher Training.

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<sup>2</sup> Approximately £250m invested in campus development over the last 10 years

<sup>3</sup> Top in the North West for Student Satisfaction 2014

<sup>4</sup> QAA, OFSTED and the NMC

<sup>5</sup> Report entitled 'Higher Education as a Tool of Social Mobility' by Professor Michael Brown published on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014.

Alongside these known changes, we are aware that the outcome of the election is likely to have implications for student numbers and fees and funding generally but those implications will differ depending on the nature of the Government. In addition, although not directly covered by this Agreement, we are alert to potential changes to the funding of Nurse training, including the likely commissions over the next 5 years.

### **1.3 Our Response**

Notwithstanding this unprecedented level of turbulence, we remain steadfastly committed to our mission to deliver opportunity for all. We are proud of our tradition in attracting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds and expect the majority of our students to continue to come from widening access priority groups. Our primary objective therefore is to maintain our focus on recruiting and supporting students from a diverse range of backgrounds both to maximise their potential at University and to progress into graduate level employment or further study to enhance their life chances. In order to maximise our resources, we intend to continue to deliver on this objective through the way in which we configure and deliver our mainstream services and support.

In order to identify our future priorities, we have undertaken analysis of our past performance and considered both the internally and externally available evidence on the effectiveness of different forms of financial support; we have also considered the external environment within which we are likely to be operating, including the competitive environment and the likely impact on student numbers and on the potential for growth. On the basis of this analysis, we have identified our future strategic priorities and, through our Performance Indicators, those areas where we feel we can make the most significant contribution.

As can be seen from the proposed balance of spend, the activities we will undertake and our performance indicators, we will seek to achieve a balance between access, success and progress and will configure our financial support in pursuit of these objectives. In what we anticipate to be challenging circumstances, we remain committed to maintaining our position as a provider of higher education for students from low income families and students from low participation neighbourhoods; we will also maintain our commitment to supporting access to Care Leavers and to disabled students. Given our commitment to supporting access from these groups (and the expectation that the majority of our students will continue to come from widening access priority groups), we will place a greater emphasis on supporting retention, attainment and opportunities for progression into graduate level employment.

In deciding how to configure our financial support package, we have considered the evidence of the relative effectiveness of the NSP, as compared to the Access to Learning Fund and our own Hardship Fund. In light of this we have created a

financial support package which we consider will best support our future priorities. Full details can be found in section 4.4 below.

## **2. Fee Levels 2016/17 (for fee regulated provision)**

The University recognises the considerable investment students make in their higher education. As the major funder of their education, they have a right to expect and receive the highest quality learning and living experience and to expect that the investment they have made will enhance their employability. The University has a proud record of delivery in these areas but this cannot be maintained or further developed without an appropriate level of resource. In considering fee levels, the University has taken account of the increasing pressure on the unit of resource through the static fees alongside increased costs and through reductions in government funding.

The University intends to charge all students undertaking full-time honours degree and PGCE programmes £9,000 per annum. Fees for Foundation Degrees (including those offered at partner colleges) will be set at £6,000 per annum. Fees for sandwich years and year abroad will be £1,800 and Erasmus will be £1,000 (lower than the permitted maximum).

Fees for part-time students undertaking first degrees and PGCEs are based on the number of credits undertaken in any one year of study (to a maximum of £6,750).

The University will apply annual increases in line with the amount set by government each year.

As part of our strategy to support progression, we will encourage further study for Edge Hill students by providing both current students and alumni with 20% fee remission on the cost of their Master's programmes with the University. In addition a new initiative will ensure that all Edge Hill students and alumni benefit from a 50% fee remission for MRes programmes in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences.

## **3. Expenditure on additional Access, Success and Progress measures**

In determining the level and type of expenditure from additional income, we have assessed our record on Access, Success and Progression and considered this against the likely future context.

### ***3.1 Assessment of Access Record***

The University has a robust track record in Widening Participation which is central to our mission and which we intend to maintain. Despite Government policy militating against access for some categories of students, our success in continuing to attract

students from our target groups is borne out by the HESA Performance Indicators where we perform above benchmark:

Category	Characteristic	Actual % (2013/14)	Benchmark %
Young FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	NS SEC classes 4/5/6/7	40.3	40.1
Young FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Low participation neighbourhoods	20.8	14.3
Mature FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	No previous HE qualification	18.7	12.8

Data from HESA Performance Indicators published 2014 (Participation Data)

Achieving this position has involved many years of sustained, deliberate activity, working in partnership with schools and colleges in the region to raise aspiration. The infrastructure required to maintain this intensive, partnership approach is high but we believe it to be central to raising aspirations in low participation and deprived neighbourhoods.

In addition to the above, the University is proud of its record in raising aspiration amongst Care Leavers and our collaborative work with other universities through the Frank Buttle Trust to reach this group. This has resulted in the recruitment of 36 Care Leavers in 2014/15 and we remain committed to this work for the future.

As a University with a strong tradition of mature student recruitment, we have noted the national reduction in applications from this group in recent years. We have expanded our Access provision through specific programmes such as Fastrack to seek to address this and we remain committed to reaching out to this group. We are conscious however that changes in fees and funding have had a particularly negative impact on such students and consider that more concerted policy changes are required to avoid an ongoing decline in the attraction of such students to HE.

Over the last 2 years we have identified a growing number of students, predominantly from non-traditional HE backgrounds, who, despite securing a place on a Programme, failed to enrol. For 2014 entrants, working in partnership with the Brightside Trust we piloted a new mentoring scheme for students identified as potentially vulnerable, to support them between the period of acceptance on a Programme and formal enrolment. Further details under 4.1 below.

### **3.2 Assessment of Retention Record**

Given our student demographic, retention was once a particularly challenging area for the University and, as a sector, there continues to be a correlation between recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and retention issues. This

is often not about potential or ability but is more concerned with culture and practical lifestyle issues (such as the level of caring responsibilities carried by many such students both young and mature). We are therefore particularly pleased that our integrated, life-cycle approach to student support is now demonstrating significant improvement in this area.

Our overall strategic approach aims to increase the sense of belonging that students feel even before they arrive; we have invested significantly in understanding our applicant and student journey and we continue to enhance this approach via a co-ordinated range of activities, relationships and interventions which are aimed at engendering a sense of engagement; these range from a key focus on the importance of effective induction and early creation of peer relationships to proactive monitoring of student engagement and early intervention with those who appear to be disengaged, via an effective personal tuition system.

The efforts we have invested in retention are demonstrably benefiting our students; the table below illustrates for example, that for both young students from low participation neighbourhoods and for mature students with low PEQs, we are performing well above benchmark in relation to retention.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Actual % 2012-13</b>	<b>Benchmark %</b>
All UG FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Non-continuation following year of entry (YoE)	7.6	8.5
Young FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Non-continuation following YoE from low participation neighbourhoods	7.4	8.8
Mature FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Non-continuation following YoE with no previous HE qualification	10.2	11.9
All UG FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Projected degree	82.3	78.2
All UG FT 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Leave with no award	8.4	12.4

Data from HESA Performance Indicators published 2013/14 for intake 2012/13 (Non-continuation data)

The campus experience is central to our offer to students and contributes significantly to the integration and socialisation essential to support retention. In line with our Estates Strategy, therefore, we have invested heavily in this area: we opened a major new building, 'The Hub', in September 2011. This provides more social and personal learning space alongside improved guidance services and ready access to the Students' Union (SU). At the same time, we opened a new Health and Wellbeing Centre, where our students can receive the highest level of personal care and support. A major refurbishment of our on-site theatre was completed in 2012

with enhanced social facilities. 2013 saw a significant new building for media-related disciplines (Creative Edge) with state-of-the-art facilities, and we invested in additional laboratories to support enhanced provision for Biology.

We also know that the retention of young students is dramatically improved if they are resident on campus for their first year, improving their integration into University life. We have therefore deliberately grown the number of bed spaces on campus from a relatively low base of 600, to in excess of 2000 by September 2015. In future, we expect this to enable us to guarantee a place in Halls for all first year students who wish to live on campus, enhancing their overall University experience and improving their chances of success.

We consider our investment in the physical infrastructure central to supporting good retention rates and there are plans in our Estates Strategy to continue this investment, detailed below in 4.2.

Our own research tells us that poor attendance and engagement is a key indicator of 'at risk' students, albeit that the reasons for sporadic or erratic attendance are immensely varied. We have been active in improving our tracking and monitoring processes in this respect so that appropriate early interventions can be made. We now employ tracking officers in two of our three Faculties and have well established follow-up processes to identify and address issues for individual students. Working with our students, we have revised our personal tutor system which now provides more opportunities for direct contact and, during 2011/12 we undertook a major review of the Induction process which was successfully implemented for 2012 entrants. Academically, these initiatives are supplemented with an increased emphasis on formative assessment and a more structured approach to feedback. Notwithstanding the improvements we have made, we consider there is even further scope for improvement and this will be a focus for our work and financial investments from 2016 onwards, as detailed further in section 4.2 below.

We have also invest heavily in a range of Bursary and Scholarship Schemes to support students financially as well as proactively offering money management guidance to help students get to some of the root causes of financial difficulties.

Whilst acknowledging the benefits of major centrally led projects, we recognise that inclusion is most deeply felt at a local level and much of our most critical work around retention takes place within academic departments. We will continue to support programme and cohort initiatives which operate across the University and will further invest in the resources within Departments to enhance engagement and employability as detailed further below in 4.3.

In noting the improvements shown in retention, we particularly acknowledge the role of the SU which works in partnership with the University to provide an excellent,

integrated student experience. The growth of student societies and the strength of the student representation system make a valuable contribution to students' social and academic life, whilst supporting institutional decisions on where our priorities for enhancement should be. Additional funding through the block grant allowed the establishment of a professional Advice Centre in 2013 which has been especially welcome and complements University Information, Advice & Guidance services. We will continue to enhance the way we work in partnership with the SU and will seek to ensure that, together, we present a coherent support network to our students.

### **3.3 Assessment of Progression Record**

The University has a strong record on the employment of graduates with one of the highest rates in the country. As illustrated below, we are delivering above benchmark on this measure. Further, as indicated above, we are in the top 5 HEIs for supporting social mobility through graduate outcomes.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Actual %</b>	<b>Benchmark %</b>
All UG FT 1 <sup>st</sup> degrees	In employment or study	93.5	93.2

Data from HESA Performance Indicators published 2013

Employment prospects is a key motivator for retention and an area we are increasingly emphasising through the academic curriculum in terms of the skills acquisitions of our students

The University is committed to continued investment to support students into appropriate employment both through the central Careers Service (where we have made significant investment in additional staffing) and through increased work placement opportunities, organised through Faculties and Departments. Despite having an excellent record in supporting students into employment, we aspire to improve our performance in this area, most particularly in supporting students into graduate level jobs (see 4.3 below).

### **3.4 Expenditure**

As noted, several sources of external funding have been or will be withdrawn (Access to Learning Fund, National Scholarship Programme and Disabled Student Allowance) and this has the potential to disproportionately impact on students in our target groups. Notwithstanding this, the University remains committed to supporting access, success and progression and expects to continue to commit around 15.5% of additional income from new system first degree students to these activities. Given our success in attracting students from non-traditional HE backgrounds however, we consider it imperative to ensure that such students are effectively supported to

succeed and progress in an ever competitive employment market. We will therefore deliberately rebalance the focus of our expenditure to place a greater emphasis on success and progress. We estimate we will commit in excess of £4,500,000 for 2016/17, prioritised across key activities as follows:

Access/ Outreach:	13%
Student Success:	32%
Progression:	18%
Financial Support/Bursaries/Scholarships:	37%

The above also reflects our intention to replace, in its entirety, the Access to Learning Fund through our own Hardship Fund and to ensure we continue to support disabled students who may no longer have access to Disabled Student Allowance in the future; it also reflects our belief that students from non-traditional backgrounds are more likely to require additional support to access opportunities which will enhance their employability and we will therefore create a new 'Study Enhancement Fund' to facilitate this. Whilst our bursaries and scholarships schemes will continue to support access and success for particular groups, such as Care Leavers and mature students, we will also seek to attract and reward excellence, wherever it may be found. See section 4.4 for further details.

#### **4. Additional Access, Success and Progress Measures**

We will continue to take a strategic approach to access, success and progress. Given that the majority of our students come from non-traditional HE backgrounds, it is imperative to our success that we maximise our resources and the student experience by mainstreaming support for such students wherever possible. We therefore take a whole institution, whole student life cycle approach, joining up our activities across access, on course support and progression.

We also recognise that central to our success is a focus on establishing enduring, supportive relationships across the student lifecycle: with schools, colleges and applicants to support access; with students to support success; and with employers to support progress. Our partnership with the SU is also critical in delivering successful student outcomes.

Underlying our philosophy at all stages is the importance of delivering a personalised experience to every student recognising the enormous investment they are making in their future. We therefore seek to establish a true partnership and sense of belonging for applicants at an early stage and we seek to maintain that through the early transition into being a student and then throughout the student journey, to graduation and beyond.

## **4.1 Access & Outreach**

Our approach to outreach will remain focused on working closely with schools and colleges to raise aspiration and identify and nurture potential. In this way we seek to increase the number of applications received from under-represented groups, particularly: young people from low socio-economic groups and from low participation neighbourhoods, Care Leavers, and students with disabilities. We recognise and support outreach as a long term priority and will continue to plan and deliver on this basis.

We intend to continue to develop our support for raising aspiration and achievement by embedding opportunities for all under-represented groups in our successful VI Form Academic Subject Conferences and Study Enhancement interventions. These activities bring pupils onto campus for lectures and discussions which support the curriculum work delivered in schools. For some key subject areas, particularly those with a high proportion of vocational learners, these events will feed into a residential summer school series in year 12.

The University is beginning to embed the Progression Trust HE Toolkits to ensure that all of its activities are meeting the needs of learners – particularly those from under-represented groups in higher education, and that activities are effectively targeted and evaluated. Taster days, subject visits and academic enrichment activities as well as residential activities all fall within this category, each supported by correlating support and activities for parents and advisors.

Through the provision of summer Residential Schools, the University continues to raise awareness and access to the Professions from under-represented groups. Subjects include Law, Business and Accountancy as well as those subjects allied to Medicine and Initial Teacher Training, where Government changes to entry requirements (e.g Professional Skills Tests) continue to impact on the aspirations of under-represented applicant groups. We are particularly concerned about the impact of interviews and/or auditions on the most under-represented groups of applicants, particularly in regards to the costs of attendance for those from low participation neighbourhoods. As part of our financial support package therefore, we have established a fund to provide support to the most vulnerable applicants and their families.

The University will continue to offer our Access to HE programme which provides opportunities for mature students, generally with no family experience of higher education, to gain the necessary skills and confidence for degree level entry onto Undergraduate Programmes across a range of Arts, Science and Education provision. This intense programme, which is funded by the University, recruits well with the majority progressing and completing successfully. Allied to this, specific project work around Service Leavers is also underway as is a project to make

alternative offers to unsuccessful applicants who apply to very high-demand subjects (such as Midwifery).

Care Leavers are offered a wide variety of support including targeted pastoral and financial assistance by the University. Potential students who are identified as Care Leavers have access to a dedicated point of contact who will support them through their student journey. Care Leavers are also an audience which the Collaborative Outreach Networks (of which we are a member) in Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria will target.

We will continue to build on the success of online communities for applicants through the development of our CRM system and an increased online social media presence using student success stories/advocates in specific subject areas to reach under-represented groups and encourage wider access to programmes.

The University offers Online Mentoring as part of its core offer for Undergraduate applicants. This project is being delivered in collaboration with a third sector organisation (Brightside Trust).

As well as providing activities and programmes to potential students, the University is also committed to providing information, advice and support to student supporters and influencers. We provide a wide variety of talks, presentations and workshops to parents of students from Year 9 upwards and we produce an annual 'Parents' Guide to HE' which is made available through workshops, school events and open days. In addition to supporting parents, the University also runs a series of teachers' forums and an annual Teachers and Advisors' Conference. We are now at the start of our fourth year of delivering a special series of 'Policy Unwrapped' events which are designed to deliver an impartial perspective on elements of Government policy (HE, Health, Education etc) which will help head teachers, teachers and others in IAG roles to better advise students and their families.

Through the significant work that our Faculty of Education undertakes with local schools, a range of bespoke partnership agreements include specific aspiration-raising activities and projects. The Faculty also successfully engages with a wide range of partners to support Professional Development which is designed to raise attainment in those partner settings.

A further example, Every Child Counts (ECC), works on a not-for-profit basis in partnership with a range of local authorities and educational organisations. Every Child Counts helps schools to raise standards. Since 2008, ECC has supported over 5,000 schools across the UK by training teachers and teaching assistants to help over 100,000 children who have had difficulties with mathematics and literacy to catch up with their peers, and by providing professional development for all staff.

In addition to academic and study interventions, the University maintains a substantial menu of Arts, Culture and Sporting activities for schools, young people and the local community. These activities play an important role in raising awareness of the University and enabling access to those who may otherwise not come onto campus; they thus make the University accessible to diverse groups.

The Arts Centre welcomes a range of visitors through its professional arts programme, attracting audiences from schools, colleges and members of both the local and regional community. Weekly Youth Theatre and Performing Arts Summer school events are also well attended by local young people. In addition, the Arts Centre works in partnership with a number of community groups, which utilise the Performing Arts spaces on a weekly basis to rehearse, as well as showcasing their performances in the Rose Theatre.

Edge Hill University Sport engages with the community in many ways. It is the host of numerous community sports clubs that use Edge Hill as their base to train or play weekly fixtures including well known clubs such as Liverpool Pembroke Athletics Club, Nethermoss Archers and Spartac Gymnastics Club. It is host to many community events such as the weekly 5k parkrun, inter-schools athletics competitions and hosts many National Governing Body sports coaching courses and events. Edge Hill University Sport also operates a range of junior activities for local children including holiday camps, swimming lessons, gymnastics lessons and trampolining. There is a thriving over 50's 'Active Edge' community which meets weekly and a very successful GP Exercise referral Scheme that sees local Health Practitioners refer clients to Edge Hill for a 10-week supervised activity program, and a weekly 'Wheels For all' cycling session for those of all ages with disabilities.

Our academics also provide a key role in building and fostering sustainable relationships within the community, through a number of community based projects, thereby reaching out to and positioning the University in the heart of local communities : for example, through the 'Rochdale Community Champions' programme, the Director of our recently established Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice (I4P), facilitates training in leadership and research skills, to a group of local residents and community activists who in turn, act as mediators/advocates to support individuals in the local community with a range of needs from literacy to support with finding employment.

We are also involved in a project entitled 'Greater Together', a Lancashire based consortium of voluntary sector organisations, where we play an important role in supporting the members in bidding for services. Further support includes hosting strategic planning meetings for managers and leaders across the voluntary sector in association with West Lancashire Community for Voluntary Service.

As referred to above, we are also working collaboratively in Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria as part of the HEFCE-funded NNCO programme.

## **4.2 Student Success**

The underlying principle of our approach to retention and student success is to engender, from the very outset, a sense of belonging both within the institution and within the relevant discipline area. From 2015 we will begin to embed our pre-entry mentoring scheme in order to better support potentially vulnerable students from the outset. We will continue to actively monitor the concerns of these students, even before they commence their studies, and the nature of support they require. This will inform our future mainstream communications strategies with applicants and students and will help inform our early proactive student support strategies.

Although we are in the top 20 Institutions for providing an 'excellent early student experience'<sup>6</sup>, we recognise that students are particularly vulnerable during the early weeks at University. We will therefore review our communications with students through the transition from applicant to student to ensure they remain coherent and effective in establishing supportive relationships and a sense of belonging.

Our activities remain evidence-based and we have undertaken extensive research into the student experience in the very early days of their attendance. We will use the outcomes of this research to further enhance the early student experience to ensure we effectively engage students during their enrolment, at Welcome Sunday, Freshers' Week and through their induction processes. In doing so, we recognise the importance of taking a whole institutional approach across central support services such as Academic Registry and Student Services as well as the primary focus at Departmental and Programme level. Working in partnership with the SU is also vital as they make an invaluable contribution to creating an early sense of community through their investment in Freshers' Week and in engaging students in a broad range of groups and societies.

Building on existing best practice in some academic areas and acknowledging the importance of identifying early disengagement, the University is currently developing a proposal for a university-wide system to monitor attendance and engagement. This will flag key risk points in the journey and will be fully integrated with the personal tutor system to ensure early, effective intervention with students who appear to be at risk of attrition. We will also continue with proactive interventions at potentially vulnerable points such as first assignment and during progression between levels. In order to further join up our academic and non-academic support services we have created more formal links and structures between Faculties and Student Services and will review the potential for doing the same with other service areas.

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<sup>6</sup> YouthSight Survey reported in the Times Higher Education 4<sup>th</sup> September 2014

In recognition of the increasing number of students in need of mental health support, we have invested in further staffing in this area both to augment the direct student support available but also to help build more institutional capability to identify and support students with mental health issues. We will also take the opportunity of some staffing changes to review our health and wellbeing provision to ensure it remains fully relevant to the most pressing needs of our students.

Alongside this we have augmented our 'out of hours' staffing to ensure we can more easily proactively identify students when they are likely to be most vulnerable.

Our innovative work on enhancing student resilience will continue alongside specific projects with individual departments to provide a pre-University residential experience to better prepare those from non-traditional background for student life.

In order to support the sense of belonging and community, we will provide additional financial support to departments for them to invest in department-led cohort-building activity such as trips and events.

Also at a local level, we will seek to build on some excellent examples of peer mentoring and look at ways of disseminating this best practice which we consider plays an important role in student retention.

Our continued capital investment programme is fundamental to our retention strategy in providing facilities for a vibrant on-site community which encourages integration and has 24 hour support services. September 2015 will see the opening of a major new Sports development, providing outstanding amenities for the whole student body as well as specific facilities for our popular Sports and Physical Activity programmes.

In recognition of the growing evidence that bursaries do not significantly impact on student choice of University, coupled with the withdrawal of external sources of support for hardship, we will rebalance the focus of our financial investment to ensure those with actual financial hardship are effectively supported and that this does not become a barrier to retention. This move is supported by good evidence of the effectiveness of our own Hardship Fund as a tool for supporting retention and success. Alongside this, we will also continue with our proactive approach to help students address money management issues which often underlie the need to have recourse to the Hardship Fund.

We recognise however that, for some students, financial support during the early stages of study is crucial to retention. We will therefore retain bursaries for certain categories of students including our Access students and Care Leavers (see section 4.4 below).

The specific targets we have selected for consideration in retention (see Table 8) follow from a review of our current performance. Whilst we have made major improvements in retention overall and closed what were significant gaps in relation to some characteristics in the past (gender, disability, age), we consider there is scope for further improvement in retention for some students and these will be the particular focus of our retention work: students from low socio-economic groups and low participation neighbourhoods; BME students in relation to attainment and all students in relation to qualifications at entry.

As noted above, the contribution of the SU in working in partnership to ensure students are well supported is invaluable. We work closely together to ensure that collectively we provide integrated and coherent support mechanisms for our students whilst we each maximise our resources. For the future, the SU is working on a range of strategic priorities which form a critical part of the student experience: their focus is on the 5 key themes of Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurialism, Representation, Democracy and Advice, Cultural and Social opportunities, Customer Experience and External Partnerships. The SU will continue to invest in each of these areas to strengthen the student voice on campus.

The SU also have an objective to increase the number of academic societies and to increase the number of students involved in societies and provide members with peer support in a more social setting. They will also provide opportunities to all societies to attend training and will work together with careers to ensure the skills gained in this area are transferable and can be articulated to enhance students' employability skills.

Similarly by investing in the course representative system, the SU will be focusing on feedback and ensuring that students have full support in enhancing their academic experience. By supporting and continuing to grow these areas, working in partnership with the University, the SU will continue to increase representation and support to students through robust systems that provide evidence based mechanisms for feedback.

As well as the direct, tangible benefits which will come from this to individual participants, these activities will play a major role in building the community and providing opportunities for engagement. They thus support both student retention and success and progression.

### **4.3 Progression**

The University Employability Strategy will continue to ensure that employability is embedded into our curriculum. All academic departments produce an Employability Plans, with departmental Employability Leads working with central Careers Consultants to ensure we proactively support students in developing employability

skills throughout the student journey. Careers Consultants will also be working with departmental Employability Leads on a range of new initiatives to help students develop their employability skills, engage with employers and other external organisations and create more volunteering and placement opportunities.

Through our employability planning and the provision of GEMS (Graduate Employment Market Statistics) software, academic departments can clearly see progress being made in terms of graduate employment outcomes and set incremental targets for improvement each year.

The Employability Strategy has already enabled good practice across the university to engage students and support progression. For example, a Talk Talk Hackathon organised by Careers and the Computing department where students worked in teams across all year groups. Of particular significance were the first year teams who, in their first week at university, gained placements with Talk Talk for the summer. In addition, in Media we have held two 'Make Yourself Employable' weeks with high profile speakers from the media industry – all to encourage students to achieve and progress. These provide examples of the strategy we will continue to deliver.

Now in our first full academic year of implementing this strategy, we have successfully bid to take part in two HEA Strategic Enhancement Programmes. The first one, 'Embedding Employability in the Curriculum', aims to support and enhance current institutional strategies and practices, evaluate the enhancement programmes and contribute to the evidence base of employability. The second one is around research into staff attitudes, alignment between modules and employability outcomes and the impact on students' attitudes, values and participation in extra-curricular activities.

This is evidence of our on-going commitment to build upon and enhance the Employability Strategy we produced, to ensure that it is embedded as a whole institutional approach and to support the employability strategy's integration into teaching and learning to support the progression of all our students. The HEA research is being undertaken via a student life cycle approach and involves collaboration between Careers and staff and students within a number of departments within the Faculty of Arts & Science. It also demonstrates the effective collaboration between a central Careers Service and our academic departments.

As referenced above, further evidence of whole institutional embedding of employability comes from the initiative being developed between the Careers Service and the SU to provide employability enhancement to students who engage in SU activities. These students will be supported in identifying and reflecting upon the knowledge, learning and skills that they are acquiring through these roles and will be able to clearly articulate this in graduate employment or further study applications.

As part of the Looked After Children & Care Leavers Agreement, we will continue to offer enhanced Careers support to care leavers from pre-entry to beyond graduation. Of those Care Leavers who have already engaged with this enhanced support, 100% have achieved 'good' degrees, and have secured graduate employment.

We will further enhance our support, working closely with Student Recruitment, to ensure that all applicants, but especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are provided with information as soon as possible about the support we can give them to successfully obtain part time work to fund their studies. An Employment Adviser post has been created within the Careers Service to specifically assist students with their applications for part-time roles, assisting over 1000 students within the first 6 months.

We will also increase volunteering activity and therefore employability skills through the creation of a new University volunteering certificate.

We are investing additional resources and staffing to further establish our new 'Edge Hill Works' brand within the Careers Centre, providing an enhanced vacancy and application service to students, with more opportunities, and more help with creating successful applications for part time, volunteering, placement and graduate opportunities. Five new posts have been established in the Careers Centre within the past 12 months, plus from September 2015 we will implement a new careers service management system, CareerHub, to increase student engagement and better enable targeting of communications to the right students. The outcomes from this investment in the service will be apparent in 2016-17 in terms of increased student engagement and activity.

As detailed below, additional resources will also be invested to ensure students have access to appropriate financial support where that is necessary to enable them to access employability opportunities.

#### ***4.4 Financial Support, Bursaries and Scholarships***

In reviewing our investment in financial support, we have particularly considered the most appropriate response to the withdrawal of the National Scholarship Programme and the evidence we have of the effectiveness of the Access to Learning Fund and our own Hardship Fund. We have also considered the need to truly enable access to those from low socio-economic backgrounds and low participation neighbourhoods by establishing a resource to fund attendance at University selection processes; and the need to ensure that students from non-traditional backgrounds are not only presented with opportunities to enhance their employability skills but are also enabled to take advantage of such opportunities through the provision of financial support. All support listed below is payable as cash scholarship directly to the

student. In deciding how to apply our resources, we have agreed that our financial support package should deliver a number of outcomes:

#### **a. Enable engagement**

Our support models will ensure that all applicants and students who wish to engage with us are enabled to do so, whether pre-entry or once on course and financial circumstances should not act as a barrier to doing so. We will therefore:

- Ensure no applicant is excluded from participating in our recruitment processes due to financial hardship through the creation of a fund that supports applicants to attend interviews, auditions or other activities which form part of our selection processes. Open to Home/EU students on full or part time courses. POLAR3 and Distance from University will be used to calculate payments.
- Provide a commitment and reassurance to students by stating explicitly that all compulsory costs of study are incorporated into the course fee: this will cover compulsory costs such as Personal Protective Equipment, uniforms, placement travel costs (the latter alone likely to require an investment of well in excess of £1m pa).
- Retain Scholarships for students studying our Access programme, Fastrack, who have demonstrated particular commitment in the face of adversity; this award particularly supports access for mature students. Paid in year of award.
- Retain our Care Leavers' Bursaries of £1000 per year.
- Retain our support for 4 Helena Kennedy bursaries of £2000 each.
- Enhance our Hardship Fund to replace the Access to Learning Fund in its entirety (£500,000) and seek to ensure no student is forced to leave their course due to genuine financial hardship. We will continually review the criteria applied to our hardship fund and actively monitor its impact and effectiveness as a tool in retention. £700,000 will be invested in this fund for 2016 to support the alleviation of hardship for applicants and students. Payments are calculated and awarded on a needs-basis.

#### **b. Attract and reward Excellence**

The quality of our University is, in no small part, driven by the quality of our students and the skills, capabilities and attitudes they bring to their time at University. We believe that, regardless of background, students excel in a diverse range of fields. We will seek to attract and reward those students who excel in any field *and*, use their skills to make a contribution to the University, through:

- Retaining the ‘High Achievers Scholarship’: £1000, payable on entry to all students who achieve 360 UCAS points in a single sitting. We expect in excess of 700 Home/EU students will benefit from this award in 2016/17 which will be paid in the first year only.
- Retain and increase our Entrance Excellence and On Course Scholarships of £2000 for students who excel in any area and are prepared to make some contribution to the EHU Community, for example, as an Ambassador or through supporting a club or society. We consider this not only contributes to a vibrant student community but enhances the employability skills of the individual. Awarded by committee. Any Home/EU Student is eligible to apply. Paid across three years (£1,000, £500, £500)
- Retain Academic Achievement Excellence awards of £500 to reward those who perform exceptionally well in Years 1 and 2.
- Retain and increase our Chancellor’s Scholarships: £2000 payable to students who make an outstanding contribution to University life. Open to all students, paid in year of award.
- In addition to the above, we will retain a range of Scholarships for excellence in specific disciplines such as English and History. Paid in year of award.

### **c. Support Enhancement**

A key way in which we can better support our students’ long term life chances is by providing greater opportunities through extra curricula experiences and by helping students build employability skills and capabilities. We will therefore:

- Establish a ‘Study Enhancement Fund’ to enable students to exploit opportunities that will help enhance their academic experience by improving their employability; examples might include support in accessing Study Abroad opportunities or to participate in an unpaid internship. We anticipate investing £700,000 in this activity in 2016.
- Awards are likely to be variable depending on the circumstances of students and/or projects. An indicative list of what the Study Enhancement Fund is likely to support is:
  - Internships
  - Cross-cultural exchanges
  - Conferences
  - Volunteering opportunities
  - Short courses and training
  - Production and performance opportunities

The fund will ensure that no student misses employability-enhancing opportunities as a result of financial hardship. Further criteria is still under consideration.

The University's Scholarship Schemes are open to part-time students on regulated fees who meet the criteria and are studying more than 60 credits in a single academic year. Awards will be pro-rata to full time awards.

Given the scale of investment in Financial Support available to students, the University will ensure that appropriate evaluative processes are in place to understand the impact of that support on each of the student audiences we seek to support.

## **5. Milestones and Targets**

Success can be measured in many ways, not all of them easily translated into simple performance indicators. Further, making a demonstrable impact on access, retention and progression requires a sustained and focused investment. For these reasons, our targets are presented over the 4 year period from 2016 – 2020. Given the level of uncertainty in the external environment however, we will need to keep this agreement and the specific targets under regular review. Specifically we will be aiming to:

- Maintain the proportion of students recruited from NS-SEC classes 4-7 (HESA PIs) (Access Indicator)
- Maintain the proportion of students from low participation neighbourhoods. (HESA PIs) (Access Indicator)
- The above will include both increasing engagement from these groups in selection processes; reducing the number of unsuccessful applicants from these groups for the most competitive course and reducing the number of students from these groups who fail to enrol, having been made an offer
- Maintain the number of Care Leavers recruited (Internal Monitoring) (Access Indicator)
- Achieve the benchmark expectations for the numbers of students in receipt of DSA (HESA PIs) (Access Indicator)
- Close the retention gap between students entering with BTEC as compared to A Level qualifications (Internal Monitoring) (Success Indicator)
- Close the attainment gap for BME students so that the percentage of BME students attaining a 'good' degree is equal to those awarded to white students (Internal Monitoring) (Success Indicator)
- Exceed benchmark expectations for year 1 retention rates (HESA PIs) (Success Indicator)

- Exceed benchmark expectations for year 1 retention rates of young, full time students from low participation neighbourhoods (HESA PIs) (Success Indicator)
- Exceed benchmark expectations for year 1 retention rates for full time, mature students. (HESA PIs) (Success Indicator)
- Ensure employability rates exceed benchmark expectations for full time, first degree graduates (HESA DHLE PIs) (Progression Indicator)
- Ensure graduate level employment at least equals benchmark for full time, first degree graduates (Internal Monitoring derived from HESA DHLE PIs) (Progression Indicator)

## **6. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary will have the lead responsibility for ensuring delivery of the agreement and will meet with the President of the SU to discuss progress. In line with standard University practice, discrete projects designed to support delivery will be subject to an annual effectiveness review and may be revised or terminated in the light of the outcomes. Additionally, appropriate and robust mechanisms will be in place to monitor the impact of the financial support package. Formal monitoring and evaluation will be through appropriate sub-committees of Academic Board which have student representation. Revisions to targets and milestones will be considered and approved as part of the formal monitoring process. Revisions to the financial commitments will be subject to approval by the Board of Governors prior to submission to OFFA.

Our processes will focus on long term measures (entrance to HE) and short term measures (such as attitudinal surveys and feedback). Using our data analysis and business intelligence function, we will track annually, application levels from widening participation schools which will enable us to judge whether our targeting of activity is accurate. We will also continue to track and analyse the number of WP applications we receive (using POLAR analysis of applicants' home postcodes), the number of WP offers made and the number of WP acceptances there are – all in relation to total volume. This, coupled with our HESA benchmark and annual monitoring, will give us a clear indication of how we are performing in relation to benchmark.

Furthermore, we will track individual participants on our WP programmes to ascertain whether they are applying to university and we will give serious consideration to subscribing to H.E.A.T to evaluate this. We will also track precisely which activities students have participated in and this will allow us to successfully identify which programmes are achieving the most impact.

We have also committed to invest in processes and systems which will allow us to better track and monitor activities that take place across the Institution. We are aware of some very good practice which takes place within individual departments, but we suspect that there is activity we are not aware of. Our monitoring processes will allow us to get a better understanding of the impact of such activity right across the University.

Evaluation will also be one of the strands of work undertaken by the NNCOs of which we are part and we are committed to working closely with the Single Points of Contact (SPoC) to make further progress in this area.

An annual report on all activities will be produced and circulated through the channels identified above, as well as a wider circulation with partner schools and stakeholders.

## **7. Provision of Information to prospective students**

Raising aspiration must be accompanied by clear and accurate information about the opportunities available and the costs involved in higher education. It is in the best interests of the individual and the sector that students make well-informed choices about their higher education options. Edge Hill has been an active supporter of the Higher Education Liaison Officers' Association (HELOA), the professional body which supports initiatives and training for UK outreach and access staff in higher education. The University also has a place on the National Expert Think Tank for A Level Reform (SPA) and was a member of the QAA Advisory Board for the Admissions chapter of the Quality Code.

Edge Hill already provides prospective students and their families with a range of information including financial support options. These are reviewed annually, taking account of guidance from the National Association of Student Money Advisors (NASMA), to ensure new initiatives are included to give a complete and integrated picture of student financial support which demystifies what can often be seen as a complex area for both students and their sponsors. We see the provision of high quality information in this area as key to the success of our strategies.

Our commitment to the provision of information to prospective students is underpinned by the following principles:

- Ensuring that clear information about the financial implications of the University's learning opportunities is available to all potential students through their channel of choice including websites, printed information, face-to-face contact at outreach events and Open Days (incorporating the exploitation of new technologies such as social networking to engage and communicate with potential students about all aspects of progression to HE);

- Presenting information in a clear, consistent style in easy to understand, consistent language and terminology;
- Using POLAR and other indicators to target specific information at priority groups
- Continued training and development of front line IAG staff and academic staff involved in student recruitment;
- Sharing best practice with other organisations;
- Developing and delivering financial support advice sessions in the region in conjunction with students, sponsors, advisors, agencies and other Associations and stakeholders;
- Highlighting the benefits of HE coupled with affordability messages based on national and University initiatives.

*Delivered activities will include:*

- Annual revision of prospectus information and UCAS Entry Profiles;
- Provision of targeted information directly to students through the University's CRM system;
- Development of web-based applicant and general guidance services including our Online Enquiry Project which centralises course enquiry handling processes and brings new enquiry channels on-stream to meet audience demand/behaviours (Live Chat, Facebook etc.);
- The production of additional case studies (website and print) focusing on targeted groups (disabled, Care Leavers, LGBT and mature students);
- Additional training/networking/conference activities for school staff and advisors;
- Inclusion of financial advice sessions/resource packs in all our recruitment events and outreach activities;
- Working collaboratively with other HEIs to ensure a consistent breadth of coverage of IAG across the region;
- Using our local connections to ensure coverage in print and broadcast media;
- Targeted follow up to Residential participants and their families
- Parent-specific communication plans and materials
- Change Direction/Mature Learner events and information evenings

Specific information on bursaries and scholarships and general financial information will be posted out in response to enquiries and specifically to all applicants who are made an offer of a place as well as clear information on our open access website.

## **8. Consultation with students**

The development of this agreement has incorporated consultation with the University community including the SU through both formal (committee) and informal meetings.

## **9. Equality and Diversity**

This agreement has been considered in the light of our public sector equality duties and aligns with our Equality and Diversity Policy and objectives which are available to view on our website. These aspects are firmly embedded in the culture of the University which has a strong tradition of welcoming students from all backgrounds. In terms of protected characteristics, the University recognises that national policy on fees may have impacted adversely on mature student demand and we are seeking to maintain recruitment from this group at a local level.

The University monitors the operation of its recruitment processes in terms of the impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a range of other characteristics to ensure our activities are appropriately targeted and we have the right support services in place. This has led to specific objectives, for example, to close the attainment gap for BME students and to target our information more effectively towards disabled and mature students. It has also driven our investment in the provision of additional residential places and more social learning space.

## **10. Approval**

The principle aspects of this agreement were approved by the Board of Governors in March 2015.

April 2015

**Table 7 - Targets and milestones**

Institution name: Edge Hill University

Institution UKPRN: 10007823

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

Reference 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)
						2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	
T16a_01	HESA T1a - NS-SEC classes 4-7 (Young, full-time, first degree entrants)	Maintain recruitment level from NS SEC classes 4/5/6/7.	No	2013-14	40.3%	40.5%	40.5%	40.5%	40.5%	40.5%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 40.1%
T16a_02	HESA T1a - Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) (Young, full-time, first degree entrants)	Maintain recruitment level from low participation neighbourhoods.	No	2013-14	20.8%	21.5%	21.5%	21.5%	21.5%	21.5%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 14.3%
T16a_03	Other statistic - Care-leavers (please give details in the next column)	Maintain the recruitment level of care leavers into the institution.	Yes	2011-12	12	12	12	12	12	12	
T16a_04	HESA T7 - Students in receipt of DSA (full-time, first degree entrants)	Ensure the percentage of students in receipt of Disabled Student Allowance is equal to the benchmark data	No	2013-14	7.5%	5.9%	6.2%	6.5%	6.8%	7.3%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 7.3%
T16a_05	Other statistic - Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)	Ensure that the percentage of good degrees awarded to BME students is the same as awarded to white students	No	2013-14	47%	49%	51%	53%	55%	57%	
T16a_06	Other statistic - Completion/Non continuation (please give details in the next column)	Ensure that the retention rate for students entering with BTEC qualifications is the same as those entering with A levels.	No	2013-14	83%	84%	85%	86%	88%	90%	
T16a_07	HESA T3a - No longer in HE after 1 year (All, full-time, first degree entrants)	Ensure performance indicator exceeds benchmark data.	No	2012-13	7.6%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 8.5%
T16a_08	HESA T3b - No longer in HE after 1 year & in low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR 3) (Young, full-time, first degree entrants)	Ensure performance indicator exceeds benchmark data.	No	2012-13	7.4%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 8.8%
T16a_09	HESA T3c - No longer in HE after 1 year & no previous HE qualification (Mature, full-time, first degree entrants)	Ensure performance indicator exceeds benchmark data.	No	2012-13	10.2%	8.5%	8.4%	8.3%	8.1%	8.0%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 11.9%
T16a_10	Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	Ensure employment indicator for leavers obtaining first degrees from full-time courses exceeds benchmark data.	No	2013-14	93.7%	93.5%	93.5%	93.6%	93.6%	93.7%	Benchmark data for 2013/14 = 94.4%
T16a_11	Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	Ensure graduate prospects for leavers obtaining first degrees from full-time courses equals benchmark data.	No	2013-14	58.3	59.5	61	62.6	64.1	66	Measure is derived from the Sunday Times Good University Guide

**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.

Reference 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)
						2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	

**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.

# Edge Hill University

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<b>Document Title</b>	Access Agreement 2016-2017
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