

Edge Hill University

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2017-2018

JULY 2016

‘Creating and Harnessing Knowledge to deliver Opportunity’

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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 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 entire student journey wherever possible in order to deliver an outstanding, holistic student experience.

In recent years, whilst continuing to achieve our targets and exceed our benchmarks in most areas, a combination of external Policy changes and the growth and success of the University, has resulted in subtle changes in the nature of students we are attracting. Whilst it remains the case that we believe the most effective approach to attracting and supporting students from all backgrounds is through our mainstream provision, we also recognise that, to make any significant further progress, on the widening access agenda, we must devote some dedicated resources to focus on our target groups.

In considering our commitments under this Agreement, we have taken into account the very challenging external environment; there are a number of Policy decisions which are likely to have an impact on the resources available to commit under this Agreement and, whilst the details are uncertain, we consider they have the potential to negatively impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as follows:

a. Reductions in Student Opportunity Funding: at present, the University receives £3.5m per annum in the form of Student Opportunity Funding, which is applied to the recruitment and support of students from under-represented groups. We understand from the recent funding letter from Government to Hefce, that this fund will be further targeted and, that it will be reduced by 50% by the end of this spending review period. It is therefore difficult to anticipate what funding will be made available via the Student Opportunity Fund for 2017/18 but we expect some reduction.

b. Changes to the support for Disabled Students: with planned changes to the Disabled Students Allowance for both 2016/17 and 2017/18, we will see the withdrawal of a substantial amount of funding for the support of disabled students. Again, it is difficult, at this stage, to precisely quantify what this will mean in terms of lost income but we will clearly seek, wherever possible, to maintain our support for disabled students, whilst obviously ensuring we comply with our statutory duties.

c. The replacement of maintenance grants with loans: we wait to see the impact of this change on both recruitment and retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds but anticipate it may particularly impact on the attractiveness of HE to those from low income households and mature students.

d. Changes to the funding of Nursing and Allied Professions: we consider that the switch from NHS Bursaries to tuition fee and maintenance loans is likely to have an impact on applicants for these programmes and will, in particular, make this a less attractive option for mature students. Further, given that we have a significant number of such students, we expect this change to have an impact in terms of additional demand for financial support from the University.

e. The recent Education White Paper: Educational Excellence Everywhere, removes the requirement for teachers to achieve Qualified Teacher Status. Although at the time of writing we await clarification on the timing of this change, we believe it may take effect from 2017. We anticipate that this change will have a very significant impact on the market for ITT programmes, including PGCE which will, in turn, impact on the nature of our intake and student demographic.

f. Changes to Level 2 and Level 3 Qualifications: Ongoing reforms to Level 2 and 3 Qualifications means it will be 2020/21 before all undergraduate applicants present with fully reformed GCSE and A Level/BTEC qualifications. The linear structuring of new A Levels and significant changes to BTEC submission rules may make it more challenging for students to achieve high grades – this will be especially true for students attending schools in disadvantaged areas where modularity and resits provide students with the opportunity to attain good grades. Furthermore, the Academisation agenda creates further challenges to fair access for students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods. In recent days, it has been announced that Knowsley will become the first Borough in the UK not to offer any A Level provision.

g. The Government's Green Paper, published in autumn 2015, proposed, amongst other things, the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework. Allied to this framework is a proposal that institutions which meet the highest level of teaching excellence, be permitted to increase their tuition fees (in line with inflation). The Consultation on the Green Paper closed in January 2016 and we await the response from Government. Although there appears to be widespread opposition to the

proposal to link fees to teaching excellence, the expectation is that it will happen and the Government are keen to implement it quickly. There is therefore some doubt about the fee levels we will be able to set for 2017/18. As detailed below however, for the purposes of this Agreement, we have assumed fees will be maintained at current levels.

In addition to the above, we are alert to known demographic changes, particularly affecting the number of 18 years olds in the population and other recent substantial changes in externally available funding, notably, the withdrawal of the National Scholarship Programme and the withdrawal of the Access to Learning Fund, likely to have a continued impact on under-represented groups. We're also alert to the significant investment that the Government are making in the Apprenticeships agenda which may impact on the choices individuals make about HE.

Individually and collectively, the above represent an unprecedented level of uncertainty and challenge in anticipating what the world might look like in 2017. Notwithstanding this, we set out below our plans to support the access agenda which remains at the heart of our mission.

2. Fee Levels 2017/18 (for fee regulated provision)

Subject to any changes implemented in response to the Government's Green Paper, the University intends to charge all students undertaking full-time honours degree and PGCE programmes £9,250 per annum. Fees for Foundation Degrees (including those offered at partner colleges) will be set at £6,165 per annum. Fees for sandwich years and year abroad will be £1,850 and Erasmus will be £1,385.

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 £6,935).

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, we will ensure that all Edge Hill students and alumni benefit from 50% fee remission for MRes programmes in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences.

With the significant caveats detailed above, full details of predicted student numbers and fee income are provided in the attached Resource Plan.

3. Assessment of Access, Success and Progression Measures

In determining the level and type of activities and expenditure from additional income, we have assessed our record on Access, Success and Progression, as detailed below, 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, we continue to attract high numbers of students from our target groups.

Category	Characteristic	Actual% (2013/14)	Actual% (2014/15)	Benchmark% (2014/15)
Young FT 1 st Degree	NS SEC classes 4/5/6/7	40.3	39.1	41.0
Young FT 1 st Degree	Low participation neighbourhoods	20.8	21.5	15.1
Mature FT 1 st Degree	No previous HE qualification	18.7	21.7	15.1

Data from HESA PIs published February 2015

Achieving the above 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 aspirations amongst Care Leavers and our collaborative work with other universities to reach this group. 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 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 and are likely to continue to have a particularly negative impact on such students. We consider more concerted policy changes are required to avoid an ongoing decline in the attraction of such students to HE.

In recent years we 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. This pilot was extended for 2015 and we plan to further expand this: see section 4.1 below for further details.

3.2 Assessment of Retention Record

Given our student demographic, retention was once a particularly challenging area and, as a sector, there continues to be a correlation between recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and retention issues. We are therefore particularly pleased that our integrated, whole student life-cycle approach to student support has historically demonstrated significant improvement in this area.

Our 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, aimed at engendering a sense of engagement; these range from a key focus on the importance of effective induction and 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, as illustrated below. We are however alert to some small shifts in the positive trend, hence our decision to introduce more dedicated resource.

Category	Characteristic	Actual % 2012-13	Actual % 2013-14	Benchmark % 2013-14
All UG FT 1 st Degree	Non-continuation following year of entry (YoE)	7.6	7.9	8.7
Young FT 1 st Degree	Non-continuation following YoE from low participation neighbourhoods	7.4	7.4	8.0
Mature FT 1 st Degree	Non-continuation following YoE with no previous HE qualification	10.2	9.4	10.8
All UG FT 1 st Degree	Projected degree	82.3	81.4	78.5
All UG FT 1 st Degree	Leave with no award	8.4	9.9	12.0

Data from HESA PI published February 2015 for intake 2013/14 (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 both to improve the academic facilities but also leisure and social facilities.

We also know that the retention of young students is 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 approximately 2200 by September 2016, enhancing young students' 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. We have been active in improving our tracking and monitoring processes to support appropriate early interventions. We have recently been working with the JISC and are currently scoping improvements in systems to better support early intervention of students potentially at risk. We are also looking to extend this support to students who have intercalated to encourage their return.

We have also invested heavily in a range of Bursary and Scholarship Schemes to support students financially as well as proactively offering money management guidance to support students to better manage their money.

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 Students' Union (SU) which works in partnership with the University to provide an excellent, integrated student experience. The SU have invested significantly in the support for student societies and the strength of the student representation system, making a valuable contribution to students' social and academic life, whilst supporting institutional decisions on where our priorities for enhancement should be. The support provided by the SU through their independent Advice Centre 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 continue to improve and are delivering above benchmark on this measure.

Category	Characteristic	Actual % 2013/14	Actual % 2014/15	Benchmark %
All UG FT 1 st degrees	In employment or study	93.5	95.3%	94.4

Data from HESA PIs published 2015

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 further 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 balance the focus of our expenditure to place an increased emphasis on success and progress. We estimate we will commit in excess of £4,800,000 for 2017/18, balanced across Access, Success, Progress and financial support.

The above also reflects our intention to continue 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; we also believe 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 continue to develop and promote our 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 Estranged students, we will also seek to attract and reward excellence, wherever it may be found. See section 4.4 for further details.

4. Future Approach to Access, Success and Progress Measures

Notwithstanding the unprecedented level of turbulence, we remain steadfastly committed to our mission to deliver opportunity for all 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 identifying 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 in the Resource Plan, 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 participation neighbourhoods; we will also maintain our commitment to supporting access to Care Leavers and to disabled students, including those with SpLD. We will add as priority groups, young, white, working class men; black and minority ethnic students and estranged students (including establishing a baseline from which to measure the latter). In addition, 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 in any event), 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, as detailed in our last

Access Agreement, we have created a financial support package which we consider will best support our future priorities. Further details can be found in section 4.4.

We will continue to take a whole institution, whole student life cycle approach, joining up our activities across access, on course support and progression. We realise however, that, as our student body changes, it may be necessary to give greater focus, at each stage of the journey to the needs of particular groups. For this reason, we will, from 2017, be investing some of our Access Agreement spend on posts dedicated to delivering on our aspirations within this Agreement. We will be creating a number of posts dedicated to the recruitment, retention and progression of non-traditional learners. In line with our commitment to mainstreaming support, we intend that these posts be embedded within existing services but have a functional connection to our WP aspirations. This approach will also support improved monitoring and evaluation of our investments.

Central to our success will continue to be 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 to maintain that 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 (notably male) 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.

Throughout all our outreach work we involve current Edge Hill students through employment as guides/ambassadors which has dual benefit for the students' personal and professional development, as well as engaging schools and WP target groups with the University. Feedback from schools, both teachers and individual learners, welcome the opportunity to hear about the student experience from those who have progressed to HE level study and are currently studying at university.

The University has embedded the Progression Trust HE Toolkits to ensure that all of our 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. 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 Preparing for HE programme which provides opportunities for mature students, to gain the necessary skills and confidence for degree level entry onto a range of Undergraduate Programmes. This intense programme, 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).

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.

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 fifth 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.

In these ways we are committed, not only to recruiting to Edge Hill but to raising awareness of and aspiration for engagement in HE more broadly.

Collaborative WP work

Through internal and external collaboration the University is able to extend the reach and impact of its widening participation work.

Examples of Internal Collaboration

The Faculty of Education and Education Liaison and Events team undertake a significant amount of outreach work with local schools, providing a range of bespoke partnership agreements including 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.

Our Inclusion Team provides information, guidance and support to applicants and students, including those with disabilities and additional needs. It works closely with academic and support staff to cover the move to university, accessing financial allowances, tailored person-centred support from Learning Facilitators

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.

Examples of External Collaboration

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) and has proved an effective tool for students from disadvantaged groups to develop a sense of belonging at an early stage in the application process and to support them in the transition to the University. We will continue to mainstream this for 2017.

We will continue to work with colleagues in higher education institutions and further education colleges across Merseyside, Cumbria and Lancashire, building on partnerships established and developed as part of HEFCE's NNCO initiative. Edge Hill University is committed to continuing to deliver collaborative outreach beyond the

initial funding period of December 2016, and we will work with partners in considering an application for the recently announced National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). We will endeavour to work with other providers in the region to ensure schools in identified 'cold spots' are prioritised for outreach projects in order that those groups significantly under-represented in HE are targeted. Collaboration between partners will support efficiency of provision from institutions across the region, through development of a shared strategy focussing on key groups (including Care Leavers, disabled students, BME communities) maintenance of a central website of outreach provision for schools and colleges and the sharing of best practice with colleagues in the HE sector.

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 2017 we will further 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 further 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'¹, 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 belonging through their investment in Freshers' Week and in engaging students in a broad range of groups and societies.

¹ YouthSight Survey reported in the Times Higher Education 4th September 2014

Building on existing best practice in some academic areas and acknowledging the importance of identifying early disengagement, the University is developing 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.

In 2016, a university-wide programme, made up of 25 project groups seeking to examine the student journey and better understand interrelationships between institutional processes, systems and cultures was established. This two-year programme is committed to the concept of supporting a holistic student experience working in partnership with faculties, our Students' Union, professional services, and students in order to understand, from a student's perspective, their interaction with a range of services and support throughout the student lifecycle which enable student engagement and success. The Student Journey Programme will also act as a consultancy for staff teams across the University and delivers a range of development opportunities to up skill faculty and service teams regarding at risk student groups, student life issues and routes to appropriate support mechanisms. We are therefore also using this valuable work to increase our overall capabilities to support non-traditional learners.

Enhancing student resilience remains a priority and our specific project bringing together specialist and academic staff to work with students will continue. This will lead to improvements in students' ability to cope with their academic studies, work based placements and their wider life experience.

We are developing a new approach to providing support to students with all aspects of their wellbeing. This has a particular focus on positive mental health as this is a growing area of need, both in the institution and the sector more widely. The recent investment in more qualified staff and a new strategy to provide both reactive and proactive support will further improve the experience of students and their wellbeing.

Work will continue to build relationships with our local partners to ensure the best access into local medical services for our students. Working in partnership with these services we will support students to access the most appropriate services for their needs and will make continuous improvements to those services provided by the University.

A recent review of the support we provide to students "out of hours" will result in revised structures of support for the future. This review has enabled resources to be

used in the most effective way to develop our on campus provision. Investment in staff who will have a remit to enhance the engagement of students in the community both on and off campus will lead to an enhancement in student sense of belonging. Staffing structures which provide high quality wellbeing, pastoral support and responsive services will improve support for those students who are most vulnerable.

Care Leavers are offered a wide variety of support including targeted pastoral and financial assistance by the University (plus enhanced access to on campus accommodation). Potential students who are identified as Care Leavers have access to a dedicated point of contact who will support them through their student journey. This support will be extended to young students estranged from their families.

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.

We are proactively developing our curriculum to ensure we continue to attract a diverse student body and will, by 2017, have a broader offer likely to be more attractive to young, men. We are also investing in the physical infrastructure to support such diversification to ensure an outstanding student experience.

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. In September 2015 saw 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. We have continued to invest in our on campus residences to allow a larger proportion of students to live in our popular and supportive community. We will continue to significantly subsidise access to the Sports facilities and the on campus Arts Centre, not only to promote wellbeing but to enable students to have exposure to experiences which may not otherwise be available to them.

The specific targets we have selected for consideration in retention (see Table 7) 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 e.g. students from low participation neighbourhoods; BME students 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. In 2015/2016 the SU changed their sabbatical officer structure to move away from a faculty focussed structure to one where roles had a greater focus on the student experience as a whole. As a result we now have 4 full time elected officers made up of a President, VP Welfare, VP Activities and VP Academic Representation. In addition to these changes, the SU also committed to the introduction of 6 new part time officer roles which focus around representation for liberation groups to meet the needs of our diverse student body. As a result we now have a BME Officer, Disabled Students Officer, LGBT Officer, Mature/Part Time Students Officer, Postgraduate Students Officer & Women's Officer ensuring that a wide range of students are now better represented through our democratic functions.

Over academic year 2015/2016 the Students' Union has invested in the expansion and growth of both the course representative system and student opportunities. An annual 'Student Leaders Development Day' has been established to identify those students who are leaders, through either representing their peer group as a course representative or supporting the running of a society group, and working with them to identify and enhance their leadership qualities both within and beyond these roles. This day was hosted in partnership with the Careers Service and is something that we are committed to expand year on year with a focus on providing employability enhancement to students who engage in SU activities.

A continuing objective is to increase the number of academic societies allowing students the opportunity to take greater ownership over their learning experience by moulding their extracurricular activity. As well as increasing engagement levels we are committed to working with our society groups in order to recognise their skills and to ensure that the skills gained in this area are transferable and articulated well in order to enhance students' employability.

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 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, Media 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.

Having successfully bid to take part in two HEA Strategic Enhancement Programmes to further support this strategy, our multidisciplinary team have completed the initial research report and are in the process of disseminating findings both internally and externally with the sector. The first programme, '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 programme investigates 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.

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.

We will further enhance our support, together with Student Recruitment, to ensure 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 in 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 '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. The addition of new posts and the careers service management system, CareerHub, aims to increase student engagement, specifically with target groups through tailored communications. The outcomes from this investment will be apparent in 2017-18 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 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 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 them.

In deciding how to apply our resources, we have agreed that our financial support package should deliver a number of outcomes, in accordance with our Mission:

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:

- Ensure no applicant is excluded from participating in our recruitment processes due to financial hardship through the creation of a fund that supports attendance at interviews, auditions or other selection processes.
- Retain Scholarships for students studying our Access programme, Fastrack, who have demonstrated particular commitment in the face of adversity;
- Retain our Care Leavers' Bursaries of £1000 pa.

- Enhance our Hardship Fund to replace the Access to Learning Fund in its entirety and seek to ensure no student is forced to leave their course due to genuine financial hardship.

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. 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 by:

- Retaining the 'High Achievers Scholarship': £1000, payable on entry to all full-time students who achieve 360 UCAS points in a single sitting.
- 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. This both contributes to a vibrant student community and enhances the employability skills of the individual.
- Retain and increase our Chancellor's Scholarships: £2000 payable to students who make an outstanding contribution to University life.

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:

- Continue to invest in 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.

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 2017 – 2021. Given the level of uncertainty in the external environment however, we will need to keep this agreement and the specific targets under regular review. The targets we have selected are those where we feel we can make the greatest impact. We have sought to have a diverse range of targets and considered at which stages of the student journey we feel the greatest focus is required. Full details of our targets are provided in Table 7 in the Resources Plan.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary will have the lead responsibility for ensuring delivery of the agreement. 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. Formal monitoring and evaluation will be through appropriate sub-committees of Academic Board which have student representation, most notably through the Widening Participation & Retention Working group. 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.

We have also committed to invest in people, processes and systems which will allow us to better track and monitor activities that take place across the Institution. An annual report on all activities will be produced and circulated through the channels identified above.

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. ;
- Presenting information in a clear, consistent style in plain English;
- Using POLAR and other indicators to target specific information at priority groups
- 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 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.

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. In particular, direct input from the Students Union has been provided in the initial drafting of the Agreement and student representatives have commented on and approved the Agreement through their representation in the formal Committee structure, including on the Board of Governors.

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. 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, we have noted that national fees policy may have impacted adversely on mature student demand and we are seeking to maintain support for this group at a local level.

The University actively monitors the operation of its recruitment processes, as well as retention and attainment of students from a wide range of backgrounds, including, specifically, those with protected characteristics. Data is analysed at individual academic department level through our annual monitoring processes. Data on

Equality and Diversity and the differential impacts on students by characteristic is also considered by our Board of Governors. Given the diversity of our student body, our preference is to mainstream appropriate support wherever possible. The analysis of performance by characteristics however, is used, where necessary, to inform appropriate actions targeted at particular groups, through for example, our annual Retention Plan. We have recently recruited a statistician to assist in the disaggregation of multiple characteristics to better enable identification of cause and effect to further enhance our interventions.

10. Approval

The principle aspects of this agreement were approved by the Board of Governors in March 2016.

Edge Hill University

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