

University of Kent

Access Agreement 2012-13

Context

For over 15 years, the University of Kent has concerned itself with widening access to higher education to all those who could benefit and has delivered major innovation and success in this field alongside the University's core objectives of excellence in teaching and research. Our continued commitment to widen access has resulted in the development of a multimillion pound campus at Medway, significant investment in a range of nationally recognised outreach schemes, as well as providing a focus for excellence in the region through our association with a number of Partner Schools and Colleges. The University is proud of these achievements, particularly since our engagement with widening access pre-dates the wider sector and was driven by an institutional commitment, rather than external drivers, to the provision of higher education to all those who were intellectually able. Further, we have balanced this commitment to widen participation with our externally confirmed position as a research led University which delivers quality teaching.

Our most visible investment in widening access is the development of Kent's Medway campus, a key component in the regeneration of the Medway towns. A development of this nature is resource hungry and further investment at Medway is still vital as student numbers grow. We must also maintain and update the infrastructure at our Canterbury campus in order to accommodate the growth in our student body and to continue to make available the information service provision our students expect. These substantial upgrades and refurbishments are planned for the next few years, so the significant cut in the University's capital grant from HEFCE will have a major impact on our infrastructure development unless we secure alternative sources of income.

Our starting position in preparing our Access Agreement is one of strength, through proven delivery against the WP agenda and as an institution meeting the majority of HEFCE PI benchmarks – and delivering significantly beyond the expected values in some areas. Therefore, we have assessed ourselves against the OFFA criteria, conservatively, as an institution as having a 'slightly above average proportion of under-represented students.' Nonetheless, we intend to commit over 20% of our spend to outreach, retention and financial support to under-represented groups, rising to 23% in 2015/16 at steady-state.

Our success in attracting considerable numbers of WP classified students to Kent means that it would be impossible for us to offer the seductive headline bursary and fee waivers advertised by other universities; however, by setting our tuition fee for FT UG degree level programmes at £9000 from 2012/13 we will be able to both honour our commitment to provide an exceptional student experience for all our students, as well as offer a significant number of sizeable fee waivers and bursaries, worth up to £9000 over the student lifecycle, to students from the poorest financial and social backgrounds.

Introduction

The University of Kent is proud of its major achievements in widening participation over the last decades and retains its strong commitment to widening participation. Kent has invested heavily in a range of initiatives from the development of nationally recognised outreach schemes to its multimillion pound commitment in the regeneration of the Medway towns. This new access agreement sets out our five-year plan within the full spirit of the OFFA guidance.

The University of Kent has continued to develop, implement and build capacity within its widening participation strategy from the first HEFCE funded widening participation project in 1996 to its current commitment to provide recurrent funding for all its outreach activity by mid 2011. From direct contact with those in targeted populations delivering support in raising aspirations, to major urban regeneration projects, Kent has played a key role in the investment and delivery of projects to widen access throughout its region.

Our quantitative and qualitative data illustrates the success of our outreach approach and the University has contributed nationally in the development of widening participation: Kent was one of a handful of universities which participated in the national HEFCE project on evaluation in widening participation, and our partnership team was nationally commended in each of the last two years for our innovative development and excellent rated training within the Aimhigher Associate Ambassador Scheme.

The University has been a leading partner in the flagship 'Universities at Medway' project; Kent was an early champion of the participation agenda with the development of a new campus in the Medway Towns; an area with significantly low participation. The University's direct contribution to the capital cost of this project to date exceeds £20m. Significant expansion of both teaching space and student facilities are ongoing and in fulfilment of our responsibilities to ensure an appropriate learning environment and adequate facilities to our students who study there. These developments must continue and must be balanced against the continued expansion and updating of our Canterbury campus. In this context the capital funding cuts will hit Kent hard and replacement income is vital to continue to deliver our innovative and insightful participation agenda in a challenging economic climate as well as provide a 21st century learning experience for all students.

Our success to date in widening participation is driven by the reality that we have never stopped our developmental approach in seeking best practice. We have sought out a range of partners with a host of different aims to work towards a better local engagement with higher education. We have also built capacity for widening participation within the University with people at all stages of their career, and this commitment will lead to a more systematic implementation over the next five years for both students and staff. However, it is also true that the University could do more to ensure the effective targeting of support to aid the retention of students, and it has thus far been limited in its use of data to track the personalised student journey from outreach to employment.

Our plans for the future include extending our work with schools, effectively doubling the number of Partner Schools to which we deliver in-depth aspiration and curriculum work and tripling the volume of student ambassadors; providing our sponsored academy, Brompton Academy, with further specialist support and an extension of our community engagement in that area, as well as introducing to our efforts targeted retention and employability support to reinforce our aspiration building and to ensure the successful transition of our students to the work force.

These efforts will be coupled with a generous package of financial support to those in most need; our financial package will combine fee waivers with bursaries provided over the full period of registration. We will also institute a work-study scheme and an internship programme to provide employment opportunities to students, both in order that they can earn additional income and to gain work experience to enhance their employability skills.

The following pages outline our assessment of the progress made to date and our intention for the future with regard to key aspects of the University's strategy and in full response to the OFFA guidance.

Fees

The University of Kent will charge £9000 p.a. for all its full-time undergraduate programmes of study. The University's Partner and Associate Colleges will charge fees as follows: Mid-Kent College, £5700 p.a.; Canterbury College, £6000 p.a.; and South and West Kent College (also known as K-College), £5500 p.a. The Medway School of Pharmacy will charge £6000 p.a. for the Foundation Degree programme and £9000 p.a. for the undergraduate MPharm degree programme.

We are not proposing to charge half-fees for year abroad or sandwich years; we have agreed to hold these fees at current levels: £1680 for year abroad placement and £840 for sandwich years.

All fees for all programmes will be subject to annual inflationary increases.

Access measures

Outreach

As documented in our recent widening participation strategic return (WPSA) the University has performed very well with regard to outreach volume measures and generally well against the HEFCE benchmarks for access to the institution. However, our plans intend to address the following significant issues during the next five years:

- Retain the stability of intake of young full time undergraduates from widening participation backgrounds after the introduction of higher fees within the sector (as defined by current HEFCE benchmarks and Kent's internal partnership targets).
- Improve our performance in the recruitment of young FT undergraduates from LPN Q1 and Q2.
- Improve our performance in the recruitment of students from NS-SEC 4-7.
- Increase the volume of applicants as well as full-time entrants to HE from partner schools and colleges and Aimhigher legacy schools.
- Undertake further analysis of our local state school intake to assess participation rates from selective and non-selective schools and the effect, if any, on subject choice and acceptance rates. This data will be used to inform the transitional targets for the embedding of Aimhigher activity and will effectively double, to 40, the number of Partner Schools of the University.
- Increase mature participation from LPN (Q1 and Q2) through the development of new access provision in Medway.
- Work collaboratively with local authorities, schools and colleges to improve access to HE by care leavers.

Our data illustrates that our performance for participation of underrepresented groups from low participation neighbourhoods against national and regional benchmarks is good. The introduction of the new low participation indicator for 2006-07 data makes it difficult to assess, on this measure, the impact of the introduction of variable fees. However, the external NS-SEC measure, where we have underperformed against local and national benchmarks and our internal monitoring of students from our Partner Schools, both illustrate a significant dip for 06-07 intake. Our understanding of this data suggests that it will be a challenging target to aim to stabilise participation of our widening participation cohort post-2012 whilst working to improve against our more challenging NS-SEC indicator by 2015¹. Equally, our widening participation strategy has always actively addressed the issue of the selective school system that operates within Kent and our existing target schools are all non-selective institutions. However, we recognise that there is value in the further assessment of our success against the state school indicator, on a local basis, to ascertain post-Aimhigher which group of state non-selective schools we should continue, or begin to work with, in partnership. The funding through this agreement will be targeted to undertake outreach work with 20 legacy Aimhigher schools.

Our five-year plan naturally falls into two halves. In summary, the first half, from 2011, will focus upon the embedding of the Aimhigher partnership activity we have developed, from legacy to future provision over the next two years. This will allow us to retain current capacity levels plus increase outreach provision in a genuine attempt to stabilise participation rates once higher fees are introduced. The second half, from 2013 entry, will focus upon the improvement of our participation against benchmarks and the more effective joining up of outreach delivery to student retention, success and employability.

As well as continuing our relationships with our Partner Schools, we will work with 'legacy' Aimhigher schools who wish to actively commit to a new partnership agreement, the local authorities and partner HEIs to ensure that collaborative work can continue productively in the region. We remain committed to the active implementation of the Learner Progression Framework, to encourage a sustained and complementary programme of outreach activities to target learners and eliminate duplication where possible. We will also continue to work with our three partner colleges: Mid-Kent College, Canterbury College and South and West Kent College, through delivery of our HE provision and outreach to their FE level students.

¹ In addition to this measure the University will build upon the work undertaken by Aimhigher to establish robust proxies for social class as there is wide agreement that the NS-SEC measure on its own is highly unreliable.

The University will provide sufficient resource to implement our existing care leaver plan, to ensure retention of our Frank Buttle Quality Mark. Practically, this will mean that we will retain the current Aimhigher team from August 2011 to ensure that current capacity for outreach delivery and evaluation of targeting and impact is stable. This investment of over £200,000 is essential in order to maintain established links and relationships in order that momentum in our outreach activity is not lost as we approach the difficulties the sector will experience in 2012.

Additional outreach, which is essential to stabilise and enhance participation post 2012, will be focussed in the following areas:

To continue to support and to develop further the offer of paid and credit bearing student ambassador work within the University. This investment has the dual function of increasing capacity for aspiration and subject-based work in schools and colleges whilst significantly improving the student experience for our undergraduates and postgraduates. These posts have been shown to improve student engagement with the University community and hence retention via active and relevant work experience which also provides a stable income stream. We have worked over the years to recruit our Ambassador base from our current Partner Schools and will extend this successful scheme to our legacy Aimhigher schools.

We will increase the provision for academic investment in the development and delivery of outreach curriculum across all departments. Equally, to address the need for improvement in the systematic provision of outreach across the University, recognition of the importance of outreach will be addressed through academic staff promotions committee.

Building upon our commitment to deliver outreach in all subjects and to make additional provision for subjects of strategic importance, the University will also assess if new progression programmes need to be developed and targeted to address access to professional programmes.

As outlined in our WPSA, the University is the main sponsor of Brompton Academy in Gillingham, an area of high deprivation. This is a core strategic priority for the University. A high concentration of outreach activity, including systematic curriculum design and delivery from year 5 (in the Academy's feeder primary schools) to year 13 is underway and will be funded through the University's outreach budget.

Finally, the University will increase its provision of community-based outreach. In addition to building upon its very well regarded community learning forum provision the University will design and deliver a modular level 3/0 programme to be delivered initially in Medway, an area of high deprivation, to help engage mature students in higher education. This work will underpin and complement the work we undertake in the Brompton Academy by engaging with the adults/parents in this community.

Student retention and success

We are further committed to ensuring that all our students, regardless of background, are given appropriate support to succeed; not just in the completion of their educational qualifications, but in becoming successful and productive citizens through engagement in graduate level employment or in the furtherance of their educational careers.

Whilst the sector data for retention demonstrates that we perform well, our withdrawal rates for our WP students is lower than that for non-WP students, these data sets are small and represent global performance across the cohorts. We plan to undertake a more complete analysis of the patterns of non-continuation of entrants with differing profiles. Further analysis is being undertaken to examine whether correlations of certain indicators exist (e.g. LPN failure rates by subject, by departments, by FECs and across the Kent population) and how failure rates and non completion factors relate to the overall favourable performance by 'WP' (all indicators included) students (e.g. drop out rates, failure rates compared to standard population). Also, if the data analysis shows that some professional programmes have significantly lower participation from some WP groups than others, strategies to address this can be developed. The University will continue to undertake this analysis throughout 2011-12 to establish baselines within which to assess the impact of increased

fees in 2012 and to monitor and assess the impact of targeted support. These data will inform targets for 2012 and beyond.

Broad targets:

- Assess and address non-continuation of young full time degree entrants from LPN Q1 and Q2.
- Model non-completion in subject areas based on analysis of WP indicators and assess whether there are areas for particular intervention.
- PT/Mature – establish new targets linked to the development of our community based provision in Medway.
- Establishment of University based work-study and internship programmes.
- Establishment of three Faculty based posts to provide targeted tracking, intervention and appropriate support as well as the identification of relevant work-study and internship opportunities.
- As a further development of the ambassador programme, the establishment of a student mentoring programme.
- Ambassador scheme to be assessed not only on success in outreach but also monitored for impact on student (ambassador) retention and future employability.

We intend to establish three additional Faculty based posts with a remit devoted to retention and employability. These posts will undertake targeted support as well as identify work-study placements and internship opportunities. These posts will allow us to build capacity within the Faculties/Departments for strong personal tutoring across the University and within the Partner College HE provision and will support targeted students in the development of their employability skills. These posts will work to identify and establish work-study and internship opportunities, and to place students from targeted cohorts in these. These placements will engage students fully within the University community, and allow them to earn money whilst developing their employability skills. Some of these placements will be with our Student Ambassador Scheme, but many others will be established in other sections of the University and we will seek to match students in area of professional interest.

To complement this we will extend our ambassador scheme from exclusively outreach activities to include student mentoring. We will establish student mentor positions for 2nd and 3rd year undergraduates and postgraduates to work with first year undergraduates. Where first year students have studied at the same Partner School as their mentor, students will be paired prior to registration; where such matching is not possible, mentors will be allocated via subject-base.

Financial support for students

For those most in need the University will provide the greatest support. Because we fear they will be the most challenged by the new tuition fee arrangements and state support mechanisms, the University will match fund the NSP and make an additional £4.4m in 2012, rising to £5.5m by 2015, available to provide financial support to these students.

This support will be targeted at two cohorts: in line with government requirements for receipt of NSP funding, those whose household incomes are below £25,000, and those whose household incomes are below £42,600. In addition, the University will also retain its Partner School Scholarship Scheme.

We intend to offer financial support at three times the recommended level for the NSP. We will provide a minimum of £9000 of funding for eligible students over the period of their registration. In order to qualify, students whose household incomes fall within these bands will be required meet a range of focussed eligibility socioeconomic and low participation (which include SEC, LPN, disability) criteria.

Those eligible for the NSP (household income below £25,000) will receive a £4000 fee waiver and a £1000 cash bursary in year one, and cash bursaries of £2000 in each of years two and three, and year four where this is an integral year of their programme. This package will be extended to care leavers. Furthermore, we will replicate this package to those whose household incomes fall below £42,600.

Medway School of Pharmacy students will be eligible for the same range of support packages.

We anticipate we will provide this level of support to approximately 500 students in 2012, and aim to increase this number from 2013 in accordance with our targets. We expect that at steady state post 2015, that over 3000 students will be in receipt of some form of financial support from Kent.

Targets and milestones

We provide additional information and context for the detail contained in tables 5a & b.

Targets relating to young full time undergraduate entrants:

- Retain the stability of intake of young full time undergraduates from widening participation backgrounds after the introduction of higher fees within the sector (as defined by current HEFCE benchmarks and Kent's internal partnership targets).
- Improve our performance in the recruitment of students from NS-SEC 4-7 (and develop robust proxy measures to aid assessment).
- Increase full time entrants from University Partner (and Aimhigher legacy) Schools and Colleges from 2013.
- Undertake further analysis of our local state school intake to assess participation rates from selective and non-selective schools and the effect, if any, on subject choice and acceptance rates. This data will be used to inform the transitional targets for the embedding of Aimhigher and will result in targeted work with 20 legacy-Aimhigher schools.

Milestones:

- Assess impact on recruitment of young students to full time programmes using measures from state school, NS-SEC 4-7, low income and LPN Q1&2 for 2012 intake.
- We will work towards meeting the national benchmark where we are below those measures and meet internal targets where we exceed benchmarks.
- Modelled data on local school and participation performance (including destinations to institutions other than Kent) to be available by 2012.
- Transitional targets within a collaborative learner progression framework will be established in 2011-12, but our commitment to continue outreach to 20 legacy-Aimhigher schools will be operational through 2011-12.
- We will monitor and establish new targets post introduction of higher fees (by 2013).

Targets relating to mature student entrants:

- Establish new community-based access provision for 2012 intake.
- Develop a programme for staff in secondary schools in the region in order to improve and increase the capacity of subject-based teaching (up to on-third of peripatetic staff do not hold a Bachelor's degree).

Milestones:

- Assess impact on recruitment of mature students to full and part time programmes from low participation neighbourhoods and no previous experience of HE for 2012 intake.
- Assess impact of new progression-provision and family learning on 2013 and 2014 applications to HE (based on one and two year access intake).

Targets relating to regeneration and community

- The University is the main sponsor of Brompton Academy in Gillingham which opened in 2010 and as such we have the main responsibility through governance and support to ensure the success of the school community.

Milestones:

Timescales and micro-monitoring are contained within the Academy's key performance indicators within its school improvement plan. In broad terms they focus upon the:

- Development of 5 University-led curriculum based projects within new specialism areas of Science and Arts.
- Leading community engagement of level 3 and above.
- Support development of 6th form

Targets and Milestones relating to non-continuation and student success:

The University will undertake a more complete analysis of patterns of non-continuation of entrants with differing profiles including the collection of robust qualitative data. This will inform our work with:

- Potential non-continuation of young full time degree entrants from LPN 1&2
- Identifying non-completion in subject areas based and assessing whether there are particular areas for intervention.
- The creation and targeting of internships and paid opportunities to include the further development of our Ambassador scheme; these opportunities to both support income generation during their study period as well as improve and employability skills.
- Improving student retention within HE in FE settings
- Improving the retention of care leavers.

Volume measures

In addition to the targets and milestones given above (and in detail within tables 5a and b), the University will also use the following volume measures to ensure that appropriate levels of activities are in place to help secure our targets:

Existing volume measures will continue to be monitored and evaluated as outlined in our WPSA return and we will incorporate our new OFFA targets into this reporting cycle. In addition care leaver targets are included in the implementation plan set out under the Frank Buttle Mark monitoring.

We will increase provision for academic investment in the development and delivery of outreach curriculum across all departments; to include additional and new curriculum outreach programmes to ensure that access to the Humanities does not become the preserve of the elite and that access to subjects of strategic importance and the professions is equitable.

In addition to undertaking the governance of Brompton Academy, the University is committed to supporting the Academy in the development of its new specialisms of Science and the Arts. Curriculum across all year groups is being jointly developed in these areas and will be accessed by the Academy's 1200 students. Within the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for the DfE the University committed to undertake five cross-school projects and to lead on the engagement of the community at level 3 and higher education, building upon our areas of outreach and curriculum expertise. New and additional funding for this work will come on stream in 2011.

Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

As required under the OFFA guidance, data and activities will be monitored closely to ensure that both can be assessed and targets reaffirmed or altered on an annual basis. However, we will continue to build upon our RUFDATA evaluation and the nationally recognised data analysis of Aimhigher to ensure that we are on track to meet our longer-term strategic aims within acceptable tolerance levels. Equally, we are committed to continue to support wider trend analysis within the region and the sector. Tracking studies will allow us to monitor applicants and entrants to other HEIs and to HE in FE settings. Regional analysis will be available to other HEIs via a centralised service that will be established post-Aimhigher. The University will create a series of interim measurable outcomes, such as impact on GCSE achievement, to help assess the impact of our outreach provision. Equally, year 11 and 12 data will be monitored to assess the impact of outreach on student propensity to study in HE.

Provision of information to prospective students

The University will publish full details of costs for students and the means of support available, its bursary schemes and eligibility criteria in its annual prospectus. As this document is published well in advance of registration, supplementary information will be produced and published both online and in print. Documentation will provide detailed information of how to calculate bursary eligibility and a web based ready-reckoner to determine the financial aid package available.

The Information, Recruitment and Guidance Unit, Schools and College Liaison Officers, Outreach Coordinators and Development Officers will have a role in the dissemination of information to the wider community and stakeholders. This information will be part of their portfolio of talks and presentations and they will deliver this information to schools, students, teachers, parents and community groups. The University is committed to supporting students through the application process.

The University will provide full and accurate information of the aggregate amount of fees and other costs required to complete our degree programmes.

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