



Access Agreement 2015-2016

Institution: Northbrook College Sussex

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1. College Mission

“Our vision is to offer Higher Education that is valuable, accessible and cost effective. To offer distinctive Higher Education that is of great benefit to the learner and also to society as a whole”

Northbrook Higher Education Strategic Plan

The College has 1020 directly funded Higher Education (HE) students, nearly 90% of which are full time. Most HE programmes are validated by the University of Brighton and 90% of the programmes fall within Creative Industries subject areas. Programmes combine academic and work-related learning to prepare students for progression to employment or further study. Links with community and industry form a coordinated strategy to provide opportunities for progression and employment and reflect the College’s commitment to attract and retain students from under-represented groups.

Curriculum design reflects both student and employer needs. All new courses have part-time modes of study and are informed by industry. Current developments include the creation of a part-time FdA and BA Top-Up E-Business and a part time HNC Engineering course aimed at local and regional businesses which include blended learning. A Higher Apprenticeship in Retail Management is also in development for 2014-15.

This Access Agreement sets out the College’s commitment to widening access and student success. This agreement has been created in consultation with students and informed by contextual data and targeted impact measures. In light of the changes to the student number controls and the ending of the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) in 2014-15, the College will prioritise activity with greatest impact. In 2015-16 the College aims to consolidate and build on relationships with schools and community to deliver sustained outreach activity. It will use contextual data and evaluation to evidence impact and inform activity and build on collaborative work with HEI’s, STEM Sussex and local schools. It will also consolidate work to fully integrate widening access and student success throughout the fabric of the college.

To achieve this, the College aims to spend approaching 26% of fee income on measures to support access and student success.

2. Fees, student numbers and fee income

The College proposes to charge the following fees for full-time programmes in 2015-2016: (these take the forecast RPI-X inflation of 3.34% into account)

Foundation Degrees	£7650
UG Degrees	£7650
Degree top-up	£8200

Part-time fees will be specific for each programme and all will be below £4,500.

3. Access & student success measures

The College continues to develop a comprehensive approach to the collection and use of contextual data. Outlined below is the current make-up of the College student body showing a demonstrable record in widening access.

In 2013-14, the HE student cohort consisted of;

- 19 % mature learners (25+)
- 18% from disadvantaged postcodes
- 32% with disability or learning difficulty
- 36% from households with an income of under £25K
- 9% from BME groups

The College expects to maintain the level of outreach currently undertaken. It continues to prioritise strengthening its relationships with local schools and increase collaborative activity with HEI's.

Research undertaken in 2012-13 highlighted that a lack of awareness of job opportunities for graduates was a barrier to entering higher education for young people in the region. Focus groups undertaken with internally progressing students reflected these concerns. In response, WP activity aims to increase understanding of progression from school to further education to higher education and on to employment. This is supported by visual resources mapping out progression opportunities from Level 1 to Level 6 and on to employment in each of the curriculum areas. These resources are available on the College website and printed copies are used in outreach activity. They are also used internally for students progressing from level 3 to level 4 and from level 5 to level 6.

The College maintains productive links with industry. Industry days and weekly industry talks are available for current HE students. In 2013 – 14 the College made these activities accessible to schools and evaluation shows that they support both increasing aspiration to study at HE as well as planning future careers.

In 2013 – 14, there has been an increase in the number and breadth of both outreach and on campus activities developed with local schools across curriculum areas. Evaluation shows that activities are successful in increasing aspiration to study at degree level. Areas of focus continue to be women in music and engineering. In 2013 – 14 activity has also extended to piloting activities in primary and middle schools within the music department.

Care Leavers continue to be an area of focus. In 2013-14, the College retained the Buttle UK Quality Mark for its commitment to supporting learners from these groups. Links are established with local housing associations, council departments and the Children in Care Council to facilitate collaboration and support joined up working.

Financial support for students

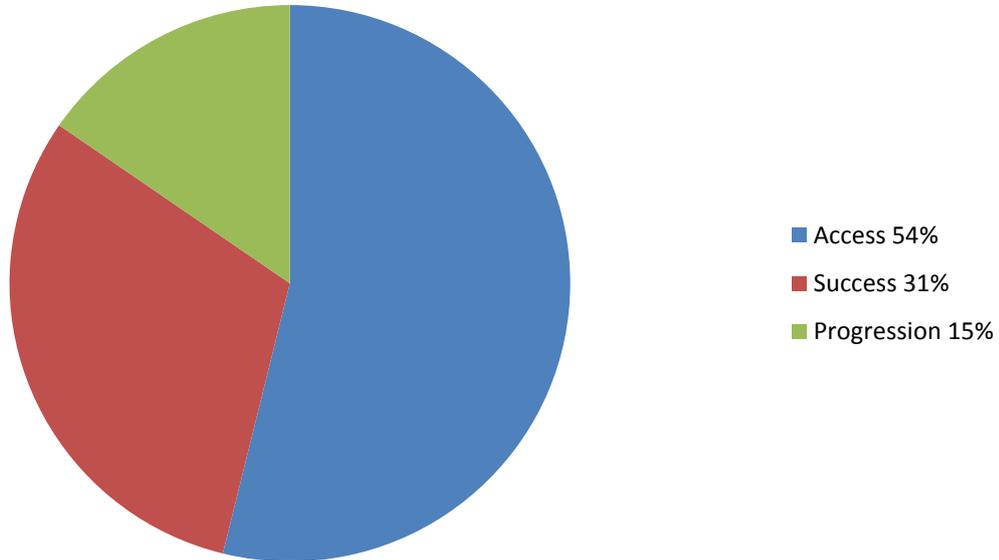
The college had been allocated £210,000 for the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) for 2014-15; this was subsequently reduced to £72,000 as a result of Government funding reductions. The College has, however, maintained matched funding for the original amount and this will be allocated through fee waivers. Each individual award will be £3,000, which results in an estimated 83 students receiving an award.

The College will offer financial support to full and part-time students through the schemes listed below and overall annual expenditure is expected to exceed £300,000. Actual amounts awarded will be reviewed annually.

1. Top Up bursaries: This is income related and for learners progressing internally from FE to HE, for career changes and care leavers. Awards are £300, £400 or £750
2. Income Related Bursary: Students who are entitled to the maximum maintenance grant are eligible for an additional £260
3. Hardship Fund: this fund is based on a learner's income and expenditure whilst at college. Learners must be receiving their full loan entitlement.

The College welcomes the shift in focus by OFFA from providing financial support to students to sustained, long term outreach activity and measures to improve retention and success. The College has reviewed and is re-positioning expenditure to target the following areas:

Expenditure on outreach and retention



Access	£70k
Success	£40k
Progression	£20k
Total	£130k

Access

The College aims to maintain a collaborative network with schools and other FE and HE institutions to undertake activity to raise awareness of and aspiration to study at HE level, raise awareness of progression opportunities to employment post degree and to promote personal development and motivation, developing skills to progress to higher study. In 2013-14 the College is working with 15 local schools.

The outreach programme incorporates a range of activities including campus tours, taster sessions, CPD events for teachers, STEM events delivered in schools or college and current HE students are involved in the delivery of outreach activity. Activity has expanded across curriculum areas in 2013-14 and a sustained focus aims to involve all curriculum areas targeting local schools from year 7 onwards. In 2013/14 the College has established progression arrangements with two local schools and activity, including summer schools, to support students wishing to progress to higher education will commence in 2014-15.

Additional activities in development are an art and design programme with the Sorrell Foundation aimed at young people interested in pursuing a career in Art Design and Media with engagement from year 9 and further activities targeting care leavers.

The College collaborates with regional HEI's to offer activities for students from widening participation backgrounds across Sussex. We continue to work with the University of Brighton to promote widening participation activity. In 2013/14 the College has maintained a productive relationship with STEM Sussex and the University of Brighton to deliver STEM activity in schools and a pan Sussex event targeting care leavers collaborating with the Universities of Chichester and Sussex. The College also participates in activities initiated by local schools which include talks, events and parents evenings which are collaborative efforts with regional universities. In 2014 / 15 regional universities will be invited to participate in future larger scale events at Northbrook aimed at local schools and internal progressing students to add value to our offer to support students into Higher Education. The Northbrook Students' Union Association which will be an affiliate of the University of Brighton Students' Union is due to become operational in 2014-15.

The College continues to build on its existing links in the community to raise awareness of opportunities in higher education for mature learners who may have been out of education. Opportunities for mature learners with industry experience are available in Creative Industries courses and are communicated through marketing channels. Applications from mature learners (21+) are 8% above the national average. Two Access courses, in Health Studies and Social Sciences facilitate progression to higher education.

Success

Relatively small class sizes across HE enable tutors to respond to individual learner needs. The College maintains an excellent tutorial system and high levels of Additional Learning Support. A programme of study skills workshops to support students with their academic work has been established in 2013 -14 to replace the intended PASS scheme. The mentoring scheme within in the Technology department for Motorsport Engineering students has seen an increase of 22% in success and retention for young students in 2012-13.

In 2013/14, student induction processes within the music department are being supported by introducing social activities in the absence of a Students' Union. This aims to promote the development of a social and academic identity and strengthen friendships and peer networks.

Employability and enterprise is embedded within the curriculum. Ninety per cent of the HE offer is within Creative Industries subjects. The College maintains strong established links with industry and quality student placements are offered in nationally recognised cultural organisations such as Glyndebourne, the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre and Pinewood Studios as well as regional organisations such as Brighton Fringe, The Great Escape, Brighton Pavilion and Worthing Theatres. Art Design and Media students participate in London Graduate Fashion Week shows and agent showcases which result in exposure to industry contacts and employment opportunities. Students also work on live briefs and commissions during their studies. The second year experience within Theatre Arts subjects supports students to plan their next steps, identifying strengths and areas of interest. This is used to plan for employment or further study. Music students are supported to develop themselves as recording artists and develop portfolio careers as freelancers. Additionally within music, there are strong alumni networks which support progression to employment for current students. College wide, 87% of students graduating in 2012/13 progressed to employment.

Progression

Internal progression rose by 2% in 2011/12 and by 3% in 2012/13. HE lecturers offer talks to HE students on courses with direct progression routes to HE. Taster sessions with information on UCAS application and financial advice and guidance have been piloted in Art, Design and Media to be rolled out across the College. This is supported by larger scale progression events to provide information to students on progression opportunities and plans to include regional HEI's to enhance the offer are in place for 2014-15. Keeping Warm activities including a welcome day have been established within the Art Design and Media department to support students and evidence shows that these activities are effective in helping to remove anxieties around the transition from further to higher education.

4. Targets and Milestones

The College is committed to setting and monitoring sustainable and collaborative milestones and targets, these include the following;

- Increase numbers of students in WP categories: care leavers, mature students, and students from deprived postcodes
- Increase diversity of the HE cohort
- Increase a balanced representation across the curriculum
- Increase internal progression from FE to HE and from foundation degrees to BA top ups.
- Improve retention and success rates in students from deprived areas
- Maintain level of financial support to WP students
- Develop Higher Apprenticeships
- Develop an internal progression scheme for FE and foundation degree students
- Monitor WP contextual data (attendance, retention and success rates) and evaluate and report through committee structure
- Develop partnerships with schools and outreach activities
- Develop careers and progression advice, promote links with employers
- Offer clear and accurate information to prospective learners on the range of financial support available
- Maintain high level of learning support to ensure success
- Support the development of Northbrook Students' Union

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

The College is fully committed to monitoring compliance and will undertake an annual monitoring of this access agreement to confirm progress, and to take any corrective action necessary, towards the targets and milestones.

The Head of HE will report through Annual Academic Health Review and progress will be monitored through the following; Senior Leadership Team, the termly Higher Education Review Board, the Equality & Diversity Committee and the Governors Curriculum Standards Committee. Students are represented at HERB, the E&D Committee and CSC.

WP activity will be monitored and evaluated using quantitative and qualitative data to measure impact. For example, questionnaires will be used to analyse participant responses, learning and behaviour and will inform WP activity and the HE strategy.

6. Equality and diversity

The College is committed to providing equality of opportunity for all and this access agreement describes a strategy to provide fair access in the creation of a diverse student body which reflects the region.

The College reviews all policies and processes and impact assesses them to ensure none of the nine protected characteristic groups are disadvantaged. The College has published its Single Equality Public Sector Statement, a report on how it is meeting the general duty of eliminating discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations across the different protected characteristics. The reporting of the Access Agreement through the E&D committee facilitates the linking of widening participation to the E&D strategy.

In response to research undertaken in 2012/13 to explore issues of disengagement within the LGBT community, a number of activities have been put in place to enhance the inclusivity of the student experience. An LGBT representative for the College was put in place to develop change mechanisms and provide support mechanisms for LGBT students. Research also informed the marketing approach to ensure web and print promotional materials are reflective of students with protected characteristics under the Equality Act. An additional LGBT page on the college website has been developed to provide information and resources for LGBT students.

7. Provision of information to prospective students

The College publishes clear, accessible and timely information for prospective students on HE fees and the range of financial support available. Communication is through the College website, promotional materials; the UCAS website, HE admissions process, the offer letter and through HE information events and open days both at local schools and the College.

Admissions staff, student finance support services, course tutors and the marketing team provide information and students are consulted on the effectiveness of this public information.

8. Consulting with students

The College is committed to working with our students. Students are represented at the Higher Education Review Board, the Equality & Diversity Committee and Governor Curriculum Standards Committee and are consulted through Learner Voice mechanisms which include focus groups, student representation at meetings and survey results. Students are also consulted in the development of WP initiatives and have led research focused around barriers to engagement education which informs WP strategy. Additionally, research has been undertaken into barriers to education for care leavers. The research project led by a young care leaver is informing WP strategy in targeting this group.

Consultation undertaken with students highlighted that the NSP provides a valuable source of funding for students from widening participation backgrounds and there were concerns expressed that the ending of the programme could deter some students from applying. Students also expressed that the social side to their HE experience was important and expressed that a Students' Union would enable them to make friends outside of their course and work with students from other disciplines on projects which would enhance their learning experience and support the development of peer networks which would be valuable when they graduate. The development of a Students' Union at Northbrook in 2014/15 will enhance student engagement and support the consolidation of student engagement mechanisms for QA and the development of Widening Participation activity and evaluation.

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