

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2012/13

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Westminster was founded in 1838 as the Polytechnic Institution in London's Regent Street, where its headquarters building is still used as a base for full-time and part-time students today. However the University's modern history began in 1882 when Quintin Hogg re-founded the Polytechnic to establish a new model for public education, building on the pattern of his Free Schools, by helping to establish 12 polytechnics in London by 1903. His aim was to provide educational, sporting and social facilities for working adults. The commitment to Quintin Hogg's aim of providing access to learning for those who could benefit, irrespective of social class or income, is a core principle honoured today by staff and Governors of the University.
- 1.2 The University's Access measures encompass recruitment, including the design of pathway programmes into HE, and activities which support student retention and completion. The proposals set out below accord with the University's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submitted to HEFCE in June 2009. They also provide direct continuity with the current Access Agreement and the annual monitoring reports by which progress towards its achievement is tracked.
- 1.3 Westminster re-affirms its commitment to provide timely, clear and accessible information to prospective students, their families, sponsors and advisers. Guidance is being sought from current students, including the University of Westminster Students' Union (UWSU), on the design of the student support package. This includes the criteria for selection of Westminster Scholars, and the levels of information advice and guidance needed on the new loan arrangements and the aggregate cost of tuition and costs while studying. Detailed information on the criteria for selection for a National Scholarship, its value and differentiation from the Westminster Scholarships, will be provided through the University's web site and to UCAS and the Student Loans Company.
- 1.4 Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of Access measures will be maintained through the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee which reports directly to Academic Council, and then the Court of Governors. Student representatives are included in all three bodies. Regular monitoring reports for the University Executive Board will also be deployed for the purpose of evaluating outcomes relative to the University's objectives and sector benchmarks.

2. Executive Summary: fees, fee waivers, scholarships and investment in Access

- 2.1 The University of Westminster's objective in designing the new fees and funding arrangements for 2012/13 onwards is to continue to recruit academically able and creative students from a very diverse range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds to First Degrees across all subjects in its academic portfolio. The University plans to sustain and extend its current programme of Access and Outreach activities whose success has been clearly demonstrated. New approaches will also be introduced in partnership with Schools and Colleges, informed by planned progression activities and evaluative reports from *AccessHE*. The University of Westminster will sustain its commitment to fair access through the promotion of vocational pathways to higher education through the *Linking London* and *West London Lifelong Learning Networks*, demonstrated by match funded projects as well as Board membership of both organisations .
- 2.2 There has been extensive discussion of potential approaches across the University. These have addressed the anticipated characteristics of our student body in the transitional year 2012/13, and the need for effective evaluation and flexibility to adapt thereafter. The proposals outlined here have the full support of the Executive Deans of all seven Schools. The University's Governors have also endorsed the approach taken as imaginative and innovative. As such there is a shared commitment to design a credible, fair model for student support that honours the Westminster principle of facilitating access to HE for all those with the educational potential to benefit and particularly those from potentially disadvantaged backgrounds. The proposal presented here should yield sufficient fee income to replace the HEFCE funding needed to deliver and continue to enhance the undergraduate course portfolio, and fund strategic investment in access and retention activities to sustain the University's diverse student community.
- 2.3 It is proposed that the University's standard fee for new full-time (FT) First Degree (FD) entrants in 2012/13 should be £9,000 pa academic session. Course fee waivers allocated by subject or discipline will be provided for those students on class-based or laboratory based courses, irrespective of the Household Income declared for them or their families. This will ensure fairness and parity of study conditions for the majority. The fee for studio-based courses in Media, Arts and Design, and in Architecture, will be the full £9000pa without a course fee waiver.
- 2.4 Scholarships funded through the National Scholarships Programme (NSP) will be provided for students across all seven Schools including those on studio-based courses with high

course delivery costs. This will help to ensure that Westminster retains a diverse and socially cohesive student group in its most selective and creative courses.

- 2.5 Overall, the new arrangements should ensure that some 74% of students benefit from the University's student support package through an annual course fee waiver of £1,500 (for Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages, and in Computer Science), £1,000 (for Law, Business and the Built Environment subjects), and £500 (for Electronic Engineering, and Life Sciences subjects). New entrants are guaranteed to hold the same fee level for the duration of their studies but fees for new entrants may rise with inflation each year within the overall fee scheme.
- 2.6 The average First Degree fee for 2012/13 after course fee waivers and scholarships is forecast as £7683 pa. Typically about one third of students could expect to re-pay a fee loan of £7,500 pa on graduation. A significant proportion of fee income above the new statutory norm of £6k would be invested for the benefit of students from lower income and/or lower socio-economic class groups. This will be used to resource further investment in measures to support Retention and students' completion of their studies. However student support packages targeted solely for lower income group students defined only on the basis of self-declared Household Income are deemed to be disadvantageous for students from low to middle income backgrounds in London where living and travel costs are high. The University therefore aims to provide support for the wider group.
- 2.7 The University accepts the allocation of National Scholarships and undertakes to match fund these through the Retention model by allocating funded support in the Scholars' second and final years of study. Students will be offered a choice of funded support, one element of which would always be the option of additional fee waiver. The other options will include credits for a University provided service such as Hall of Residence fees, a study support package including a laptop and credits with the campus-based Marylebone Books, a travel award, and a Graduate Development award for mentoring, internships and career development support following graduation. A maximum £1000 cash payment will be included as an option within the total package valued at £6000 (£3000 of NSP Scholarship matched by the University's funding of £3000).
- 2.8 These fee arrangements apply to Full-Time (FT) First Degree students (FD) in 2012/13 and Foundation Year (Level 3) students. Arrangements for Foundation Degrees (at Levels 4 and 5) delivered in collaboration with established School and Further Education College partners are currently being finalised. Additional support is planned for Sandwich (SW) course students in future years. No proposals are presented for part-time (PT) students at this stage as the scope for delivery of accelerated degree courses is currently being explored.

3. Westminster's diverse study body

- 3.1 Extensive modelling of the potential options in the context of the data on the First Degree populations in 2009/10 and 2010/11 has helped to refine the proposals. Unlike many institutions, the scenario planning at Westminster is more complex and dynamic because of our current student population which includes 43% from households with incomes below 25k and 51% from household incomes of more than 42.6k. The former is a very high proportion relative to the majority of institutions, and reflects our success in widening participation. It has also been identified as the student cohort who could be particularly sensitive to the new funding arrangements.
- 3.2 Some 33% of First Degree students come from lower socio-economic groups. Typically 49% are admitted solely on the basis of their UCAS tariff score of A level points; other students have completed vocational qualifications or international qualifications. Some 30% are mature students at the point of entry (aged 21+). Around 28% come from Asian backgrounds, 18% from Chinese or mixed race backgrounds, 14% from Black backgrounds, and 40% from White backgrounds. (NB Some 20+% of FT FD students elect not to declare their ethnicity on application). Students from lower income groups are included in all School communities across the full subject range, typically forming one third of their cohort group. Linguistic diversity is a notable strength: on one professionally accredited course the range of languages spoken is as high as 27 across a group of 80 students. Some 85% of First Degree FT students come from within the M25, and 95% of all new entrants have been educated at state schools, sixth form colleges and/or Further Education Colleges.
- 3.3 Of the 4179 strong full-time new cohort of entrants in September 2010, 1611 are from <£25k backgrounds who are eligible for financial support through fee waivers, and a further 187 students are from low-mid income families (<42.6k) with partial eligibility for financial support. This is a significantly high number of students from low-mid income backgrounds. The rationale for deploying a course fee waiver approach is that it makes a reduced fee accessible to some 74% of FD students. These would be funded by the University through its own investments. This would be in addition to its match funding of the National Scholarships.
- 3.4 Recruitment remains buoyant: Westminster's market share has increased by 15%, almost twice the sector average. Typically there are 4-5 applications for each place. However many students still find the transition from School or College to University a steep ramp and progress between academic levels is slower for these groups. The student support package for new First Degree students from 2012/13 is therefore based on a Retention model, to provide support in a student's first year and then their later years of study. Study Skills

programmes and interventions to support higher retention are provided through the Level 4 Transitions Group; these may be extended for future entrants.

4. Assessment of the University of Westminster's Access record

4.1 Westminster currently exceeds its HESA benchmarks in terms of recruitment of 95% of its FD students from the state sector, of whom 33% of students are drawn from socio-economic classes 4 -7, including 11.3% mature learners, with 88.2% overall continuing in Higher Education. The University remains committed to recruiting and supporting students from lower socio-economic groups and to the promotion of diversity. During the first Access Agreement period the University's investment in Access and Retention has risen from 22% to 32% of the additional fee income. Some 60% of students have been entitled to a Bursary (at £400pa in 2010/11).

Collaborative working

4.2 Westminster is a long-standing contributor to national and regional groups whose purpose is to encourage individuals to aspire to study at HE level either in their local FE College or within a university. While the outcomes of these projects have resulted in direct recruitment to the University of Westminster in many cases, collaboration to promote cross-sector partnerships has been the primary aim, particularly in the London region, and this will continue.

4.3 The University of Westminster's track record of recruiting and retaining students from the broadest range of backgrounds is widely recognised. In part this is a reflection of the partnership with **Quintin Kynaston School**, co-founded by the Polytechnic in 1896 and now a leading London School which contributes to the improving standards agenda in other schools. It is also symbolised by the **Westminster Group** collaborative network of Further Education Colleges (FECs) founded in the mid 1990s, through which Foundation Degrees have been jointly designed since 2002 to provide a direct route to employment with a link to honours degree level study. The University is a leading provider of CPD qualifications for teachers in the post-statutory sector, developing and extending the Certificate of Education programme of qualifications, which in turn makes a significant contribution through outreach in London's colleges. This has complemented the partnership with the City of Westminster Council and Camden Council in serving the needs of the University's local school communities.

4.4 The University's outreach work has focused since 1990 on the promotion of widening participation with activities in schools and colleges designed to motivate young people to work towards pathways into university education in London - not just at Westminster.

Collaborative working with other HEIs will continue, through the commitment to engage actively with *AccessHE* (through London Higher) and *Linking London*, the Lifelong Learning Network based at Birkbeck, and the *West London Lifelong Learning Network*. The University has hosted the HEFCE resourced WECAN Aimhigher organisation for several years and remains involved in its adaptation to provide a continuing sector-wide service for schools, colleges and universities through AccessHE. Westminster also hosted the HEFCE funded UK-wide AchieveAbility project (to June 2010), for an inclusive learning approach designed for those with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) to be adopted for wider use for all learners. Support for these networks is ongoing.

Student Ambassadors and mentors

- 4.5 One of the most successful features of Aimhigher's work has been the Student Ambassador Schemes. Highly motivated Westminster students are selected and trained as mentors for school pupils and college students, acting also as campus guides, facilitators for current students completing NSS and SES questionnaires. The Student Associates Scheme (SAS) funded by the Training and Development Agency (TDA), operates on a similar basis, training students to work as classroom assistants for a total of six weeks in schools in disadvantaged areas of London. The University of Westminster has hosted this HE sector scheme since its inception in 2008; the University has extended this scheme from 2011/12 and is restoring coverage across all disciplines (not just STEM subjects as now).

Access to Modern Languages

- 4.6 Modern Languages have been a focal part of the part-time and full-time curriculum offer since the inauguration of the Polytechnic of Central London in 1970, when degrees were validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). The Evening Languages scheme has provided access to over 25 languages for new starters and keen linguists alike, with employer-sponsored students in the same class groups. More recently full-time students have benefitted from new pathways for native speakers and these have informed the language specific outreach programme **Routes into Languages** funded by HEFCE, which is hosted with two co-Directors at Westminster. During the last three years the scheme has reached over 20,000 young people and c550 parents, with some 1300 hours of language enrichment activities. 160 additional Student Ambassadors have been trained, supporting Immersion Saturdays and Revision Workshops in Languages. This Outreach work will continue to be embedded in the University's strategic framework for Access, through contributions to national initiatives as well as employability-themed events in local schools and colleges in London, beyond the current funding round (to summer 2012).

Build Up

- 4.7 Graduates will continue to be supported through the innovative **Build Up** scheme funded as an Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) project match funded by the University. This helps unemployed Built Environment graduates prepare for employability during periods of industry downturn; this has benefitted c1000 graduates from different HEIs so far.
- 4.8 Leadership and innovation in architectural education in central London have been a key part of Westminster's institutional history since before WWII, when Regent Street Polytechnic educated many of the architects who went on to play a role in the Festival of Britain and post-war development in the Capital. An inclusive and engaging approach by staff has ensured that students from a wide range of backgrounds flourish, and in fulfilling their potential they secure professional body awards from the RIBA. The University plans to support the development of the new Access to Architecture Outreach and Scholarship programme being developed by the Stephen Lawrence Trust, potentially through studio placements and mentoring for aspiring architects from disadvantaged backgrounds in London, as well as through Summer Schools.

Learning support

- 4.9 The support model for students is already embedded through tutorial structures and services for students. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) commended the well-developed learning and teaching support structures at Westminster in the 2010 Institutional Audit. Typically First Degree students have three hours of teaching plus tutorial guidance, and are supported through buddy groups: students who are well grounded in their studies mentor new students. Professionally qualified Student Advisers offer all-round support on academic, financial, personal and health matters. Tutorial support officers also provide guidance for students, especially those who are less confident or financially stretched who are at risk of withdrawing. Westminster is committed to joining the UCAS-Open University scheme *Back on Course* from Summer 2011 to help identify students who, given additional guidance and learning support, may be persuaded to resume their studies either at HE or FE level.
- 4.10 Westminster's Scholarships programme has been recognised by the Times Higher for its enabling role in supporting individuals who then contribute to their communities. These Scholarships will be extended to ensure that all applicants continue to have access to the most selective courses, and those which provide pathways into the professions, with School-hosted celebrations of achievement for the scholars, their families and friends.

5. Other access and outreach activities

5.1 The University's KPI for widening participation is 5.9% which is in the same range as its direct comparators within the London region. During the last decade the University of Westminster's other access activities have featured:

Outreach

5.2 Taster days, Master classes, teacher and pupil visits, mature student workshops, and disabled student workshops coordinated by the Education Liaison and Development team has included work through SHELL (Schools and HE Learning in London). Normally these activities are led by senior academic staff across the full subject range in all seven Schools. This has helped to ensure in an inclusive way that each discipline has a significant number of students from communities previously under-represented in higher education. These activities will continue in 2012/13. Summer Schools will also be expanded.

Student Care Leavers' scheme

5.3 The University's support to students who have progressed to University after living in residential care homes was recognised through achievement of the Frank Buttle Trust Award (2006). Care Leavers receive state funding as well as generous UW funding, access to scholarships and support through the Counselling team, and will continue to be supported in 2012/13.

Young Offender programmes (social inclusion through AchieveAbility)

5.4 In 2008 the University of Westminster ran a pilot project for young male offenders with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) two-thirds of whom were motivated to engage formally with HE subsequently; this was profiled in the London Higher CSR report. This was one of the UK-wide AchieveAbility scheme projects, managed by the University of Westminster, with Barry Sheerman MP as President in his role as Chair of the Select Committee for the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). AchieveAbility was funded to 2010 to produce training materials Westminster and programmes in Inclusive Learning to familiarise education professionals with multi-sensory classroom teaching practice; 200 teachers were trained and the materials were published in 2010.

Workplace and community internships

5.5 The University of Westminster Community Volunteering scheme has paralleled the Outreach work in Schools, Colleges and sector networks. In 2010/11 the Career

Development accreditation scheme for the Career Skills Award has been profiled through Linking London for the benefit of the wider network, to promote graduate employability.

Mentoring

- 5.6 The University's Strategic Innovations Fund sponsored the development of e-Mentoring, piloted on the professionally accredited Psychology courses, and this has subsequently been extended to other subject areas. The University will continue to support the UK mentoring scheme for students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

Transitions projects from Level 3 to Level 4

- 5.7 Two schemes – *Hit the ground running* and *Gear up to Study* have benefitted new entrants yielded recordings for use with future applicants. This is being expanded for 2011 as an interdisciplinary online site to support students in accessing information about HE.

Law students volunteering

- 5.8 The Pro Bono Law Office and the Innocence project have both provided intending solicitors with the opportunity to gain experience of the workings of the legal justice system, providing value to the community and developing the professional practice skills of the LL.B students.

Quintin Kynaston (QK) School pupils

- 5.9 The University of Westminster shares its founder - Quintin Hogg - with the School, 40% of whose students come from two of the most deprived wards in the UK. 89% of students are from ethnic minority groups, and more than 60 different languages and dialects are spoken by the pupils. Their achievements are widely reported: the School is in the top 3% for progress between the ages of 11 and 19, and 91% stay on to Sixth Form level, by comparison with a UK average of 55%, and all Year 13 students are offered University places. The University supports the School in many different ways, under the leadership of the Chair of Governors, a senior member of University staff. New initiatives for 2011/12 onwards include support for Displaced or Vulnerable in Education (QK Doves) in locating accommodation and mentoring support for those likely to withdraw from their studies.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 6.1 The University has good experience of monitoring and evaluating its access activities both independently and as part of a wider group of peer institutions. However it is recognised that the collection and analysis of data, and production of interpretive reports will need to

inform the prioritization of Access and Retention activities in a more focused way as the FE and HE study environment becomes more complex from 2012/13. It is intended that evaluation of potential impact as well as direct participation will be included in the measures which will underpin the new Access Agreement.

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