

Reaseheath College

Access Agreement 2014/15

Reaseheath College (RHC) is a specialist Land Based Further Education College. Higher education at RHC was (up until 2012) indirectly funded via two higher education institution (HEI) partners: the University of Chester (UoC) and Harper Adams University (HAU), making a higher education student population at Reaseheath of approx. 700FTE's; the funding for these places was secured via both partner institutions.

However, from September 2012/13, the partnership with HAU matured and, through consultation with HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England), RHC became directly funded, culminating in all future HAU affiliated student numbers transferring to RHC. For the academic year 2014/15, the college can confirm that our student number control allocation is 85. As RHC are intending on charging more than the basic Government stipulated tuition fee for most of its full-time (established) HE programmes of study in 2014-15, the intention of this access agreement is to support students studying at RHC in 2014/15. The UoC has submitted an OFFA agreement that includes students studying at RHC in 2014/15, but they remain UoC numbers, franchised to RHC. There is no intention to move away from the partnership with the UoC, so this arrangement will continue.

In framing this access agreement, RHC has given due care and consideration to the impact of these proposals on prospective students with protected requirements/attributes, including those of disability, minority ethnicity, age, gender, and to those from disadvantaged/low income backgrounds. This access agreement will further aim to provide a clear rationale of how the college's approach will help to improve access and student success for under-represented groups, providing evidence where appropriate. The agreement will also evaluate programmes in place to capture how the financial support is helping the college achieve its aims.

1 Fee limits and fee income above £6,000

A Fees for the 2014/15 cohorts

2014/15 cohorts

RHC has agreed the following annual tuition fee rates for UK and EU new entrants joining full time/sandwich undergraduate programmes in 2014/15. The figures presented in the table below are derived from calculated inflationary increases from the fees charged for AY 2013/14:

Programmes at Reaseheath College	Full time	Part time
Full Time BSc programmes	£8,000	
Full time Foundation Degree programmes Agriculture, Horticulture, Equine and Food	£7,650	£6,750
Full time First degree Rural Events Management	£6,120	
Engineering and Countryside		£3,570

BSc Top up programmes	£7,500	
One year full-time sandwich placement year	£510	

Students who commence a foundation degree programme in 2014/15, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2015/16. Students studying during their sandwich year through RHC will be subject to a fee of £510 which is significantly below both the basic fee of £4,500 and the maximum fee of £6,750. Students enrolled on a first degree BSc programme at RHC in 2013/14 will pay a fee of £7,500 for the three years of the duration of their academic careers, with no inflationary increase in fees in subsequent years over this time.

We anticipate that approximately 85 new full-time students will join the first year of either a first degree or foundation degree at RHC in 2014/15, although this clearly depends on the Student Number Control allocation for new entrants. We anticipate that approximately 60 FTE new students will enrol on part-time courses at RHC, including those who are sponsored by employers.

This access agreement will be renewed annually. The College will apply annual real terms increases in all tuition fees, in line with the permitted amount set by Government each year, from 2013-14 onwards, in line with inflationary increases announced by the Government. Conducive to this statement and due to changes in partnership arrangements, it is also a possibility that fees will be further reviewed by RHC in the future.

The associated documentation prepared in line with the approved template indicates:

- the estimated numbers of full-time students at each fee level, including fees at £6,000 and below;
- the estimated number of regulated part-time students for whom we anticipate the fee will exceed £4,500 in an academic year;

Our estimated fee income above the basic level for full-time means that the part-time fee levels indicated above are the maximum that a student would pay (i.e. up to 75% of a full-time study load), although many would typically pay a lower fee, dependent on their study load. RHC will not charge any part-time student more than £6,750 in an academic year, in accordance with the fees regulations, as outlined by OFFA and the Government's stipulated tuition fee limits.

2 Expenditure on Additional Access and Retention Measures

At RHC, there is an intention to continue and enhance new initiatives designed to support students progressing from further education into higher education and to continue to provide additional support to first year students on foundation degree programmes in order to further improve progression rates into the second year of study. These initiatives include new initiatives for the delivery of Learner Support and in further supporting the delivery of the curriculum.

Additionally, further education staff have been involved in examining how best to support students through the transition from FE to HE. These initiatives will support our dual aims aim of increasing the number of mature students admitted each year and improving the retention rates of those students.

In 2014/15, RHC estimates that it will spend a total of approximately 20% of projected additional fee income generated from fees above £6,000 on widening participation initiatives. It is envisaged that these will include existing bursary commitments and new measures to widen access and improve retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This expenditure accounts for posts for outreach work, events and activities; information, advice and guidance about higher education and financial arrangements; and to support targeting, monitoring and evaluation of outreach and other WP-related activity, including collaborative working. The investment also supports administration of the National Scholarship Programme. All expenditure included in this agreement complies fully with guidance from OFFA on eligibility.

A Assessment of Access and Retention Record

RHC has a good record in widening access, and has consistently performed well against institutional and historic benchmarks. Reaseheath College has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of classified “non-white learners” within HE provision at the college, with 3 students evident in 2011/12 and 70 now registered to study with us in 2012/13:

Enrolled classified “non-white learners” specified by curriculum area

Curriculum Area	AY 2011/12	AY 2012/13
Adventure Sports	0	8
Animal Management	1	8
Countryside	0	6
Equine	0	9
Food	2	39
Total	3	70

In terms of classified “non-EU” student representation studying at the college, we currently have 9 students registered on HE programmes; 4 from the Isle of Man; 2 from European Commonwealth nations, 2 from North America and 1 from South-East Asia.

Similarly, with respect to retention on HE programmes, RHC has seen an improvement in retention on 2011/12, with two out of the nine curriculum areas delivering HE (78%) falling within the college target (benchmark) of 80% for 2012/13. The college is also on course to meet its widening participation targets for 2012/13 (see previous access agreement).

The College has continued consistently to maintain or improve its performance over recent years. The College has a diverse student body which includes both young and mature full-time students from under-represented backgrounds. The college upholds the belief that the investment outlined

above will enable the college to sustain this progress and to continue to attract a diverse range of students.

The college will continue to promote and develop a range of activities and initiatives to attract underrepresented groups to study at the college.

- The college currently works with over 20 schools in Cheshire and Warrington providing vocational programmes for 14-16 year olds, where pupils attend college one day per week over the academic year. In 2012/13, over 230 young people took part. The college encourages young people to think about progression routes.
- The college has an Access to Higher Education course to engage learners from non-traditional backgrounds. The fees in 2012/13 are subsidized by the college to attract potential students to this programme; there are currently 48 students on this programme in 2012/13.
- The college continues to develop its curriculum, particularly Foundation Degrees, with industry to enhance delivery and widen participation to those learners who seek a more vocational/kinaesthetic learning experience.
- The college holds taster days to allow prospective students to opportunity to sample curriculum areas and the diverse provisions they provide
- For students that are moving from FE to HE the college has `bridging modules and holds bridging events and summer camps, the intention being to assist student with the move from further education to higher education. There are cultural differences and often students need to support to successfully navigate this change.
- The college provides additional learning support and counselling services for students
- Where ever possible the delivery of the programmes/ timetabling is managed with the needs of industry or/ and students. For example on programmes where there is a large number of mature students delivery will where possible accommodate child care responsibilities. Where a specific industry has a need for employee and this meets the college's requirements for work experience placements we will accommodate this within timetabling to be able to release student's at the most advantageous time.
- The college has various protocols in place as part of the wider quality assurance and compliance to raise student success rates and retention. This is an improving picture at RHC.
- The college retains an Aim Higher co-ordinator who supports individuals preparing for higher education both internally and externally.

3 Additional Access Measures

A Student Retention & Success

It is the intention of RHC to sustain and enhance a range of learning and teaching, pastoral and welfare, and employability services, to support the retention and success of its students throughout their academic careers at the college, and to continue to monitor the relative performance of those from disadvantaged groups. Recent data released by HEFCE for 2012/13 indicates that RHC is bucking recent recruitment trends for HE; compared to many of RHC competitors (land-based

colleges) recruitment looks healthy, with an increase in application to enrolment conversion rates for 2012/13 of 15% on the previous academic year . Higher Education student numbers continue to grow and the quality of the provision is also improving with increased retention and improved student satisfaction (see below). However, the college is mindful that this improving picture requires vigilant management and leadership to maintain and grow a quality product. The two partner Universities have continued to offer support and guidance.

Clearly once in HE, student need to be properly supported to stay and achieve successful outcomes in their academic careers. The college has an on-going programme to increase the quality of its HE provision and in the first term (semester 2012/13) this would seem to be producing favourable results, with over all improved student satisfaction and improved retention. This academic year's internal induction survey saw the highest response rate recorded for HE learners (92%). Within that survey, conducted in November 2012, satisfaction with enrolment and induction is very high, with no negative responses over 3%, and only one question, the organisation of enrolment, having a positive response below 90%. Satisfaction with enrolment and induction was also very high, with no negative responses over 3%. This would suggest our strategies and provisions of both mentoring and support were accurately targeted and are having a successful impact.

Quality assurance practices are monitored and maintained the HE curriculum. Standardisation across all academic departments delivering HE has allowed for an enhanced student experience through transparent course documentation, enabling staff to meet student expectations and generating increased student satisfaction through promoting a HE culture/ethos.

As the cost for higher education is shifted to individual students rather than taxpayers it is important not just to improve student retention, but to **enhance the student experience and maximise the success of all students**. Through consultation with students and employer engagement networks over the past 12 months, it is apparent that RHC offers the following commendable features for our HE student body:

- Traditional closeness
- Local and access orientation
- Strengths in flexible delivery, pastoral care, student support and guidance and skills provision
- Basis for progression (prepare students for progression to HE and employment)

However, there are still some areas for improvement and avenues which we, as a college and team, need to pursue and develop to ensure that this trend in retention is maintained and built upon. Principally, these centre around:

- Strengthening a HE culture within the college to enhance and impact upon HE delivery
- Practices which sustain student motivation
- Opportunities to develop employability skills
- Focus on career education, information and guidance

Solutions

The key attribute which curriculum areas will be embracing this forthcoming academic session is the enhancement of 'student belonging'. As identified by HEFCE (2012), Student belonging is achieved through:

- Supportive peer relations
- Meaningful interaction between staff and students
- Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners
- A HE experience relevant to students' interests and future goals

RHC will be looking to strengthen the institutional data available to senior management and course managers, to enable identification of departments, programmes and modules with higher rates of withdrawal, non-progression and non-completion. In conjunction with this, course managers will be more stringent in their monitoring of student behaviour, particularly participation and performance, to identify students at risk of withdrawing, rather than only relying on entry qualifications or other student entry characteristics. The learner voice sector (course committee and student reps meetings) has also provided a platform where staff can gain a student perspective on reviewing data and experience about student belonging, retention and success. The college has invested in technological advances and this has aided communication and management of its HE provision, culminating in enhanced student engagement across the curriculum areas.

B Outreach

RHC's widening participation strategy is underpinned by a belief that anyone with the necessary ability should feel that they can aspire to higher education regardless of their background. As a further education college with higher education provision we see widening participation as an integral part of our mission and vision, indeed we have been carrying out WP initiatives for some considerable time. These initiatives include our internal further education (FE) students, ensuring they are well informed and assisted in the transition to Higher education (HE); if they chose this as an outcome of their studies. Progression will inevitably involve applications to universities and HE provision other than our own, although we also enjoy a healthy internal progression rate that we would want to maintain. Since RHC is essentially a specialist vocational institution, we have a particular interest in insuring our graduates are vocationally competent and employable.

Consequently, RHC subsidises the cost of relevant secondary learning goals across the various curriculum areas, which lead to increased employability opportunities and career development. A considerable element of the outreach investment in 2014-15 will be in maintaining the resources, staffing and other costs to support the direct targeting and delivery of inclusive and engaging programmes of study, demonstrating continued enhancement in the following areas:

- Students on low incomes
- Students from deprived geographic locations
- Non-traditional HE learners (e.g. people whose families have no experience of HE including looked after children)

- Schools collaboration (targeted links with schools with a low progression rate to HE)
- Students with physical/learning disabilities
- Under-presented ethnic groups

Please refer to RHC's separate interim widening participation strategy for 2013/14 onwards, which identifies the college's guiding principles and how the college intends on committing to monitor and improve its own strategies and measurable targets in supporting outreach investment, across targeted internal and external initiatives.

C Financial Support for Students

In order to assist students from less advantaged backgrounds, RHC will invest in a wide range of targeted measures offering financial support.

Revision to the National Scholarship Programme (NSP)

For 2013/14, we have revised our NSP allocations, based on data from the latest data collection exercises for 2012 (the 2012 Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey (HESES) and 2012 Higher Education in Further Education: Students Survey (HEIFES)). These allocations will allow us to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds with the costs of their higher education studies. This has been calculated as 11 NSP awards, or £33,000. This award will cover the cost of awards in each subsequent year of study, excluding the placement year, of £1,500 for each NSP award holder.

In line with the revised Government funding allocations for NSPs for 2014/15, and as RHC are intending on charging more than the basic fee in 2014-15, match-funding contributions mean that our NSP allocation for 2014/15 has been calculated as 8 awards, or £16,000. The college, however, will maintain the total level of matched funding originally planned to support the programme and which we set out in our previously submitted 2014/15 access agreement and NSP institutional templates. The college will also honour its existing commitments to continuing undergraduate students who entered in 2013/14 or before. These changes will be revised on the college website in a timely and efficient manner and made available to prospective applicants, as well as those students directing applying to the college (part-time students) as soon as possible.

In order to be considered for an NSP award, students must have a declared household income of £25,000 or less, undertake at least 30 credits of study and meet other specified selection criteria (available on the College's website). NSP awards will not be available to students who are ordinarily resident in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Part time and European Union (EU) nationals are not eligible for the maintenance element of an NSP award. Full eligibility criteria for NSP awards are published on the Website of RHC.

In essence, the criteria are that students who meet the household income criteria will be ranked on their academic achievements on entry, with the highest achieving students made an award. New full time students admitted to RHC in 2014/15 and who are selected for an NSP award will receive a £2,000 reduction in the cost of on-campus residential accommodation in the 2014/15 academic year

only. NSP students, who are not resident in on-campus accommodation in 2014/15, will receive a fee waiver of £2,000, reducing the cost of tuition fees in 2014/15 only.

Full time NSP students who continue their studies with RHC in 2015/16 and beyond will receive a scholarship of £1000 in each subsequent year of study, except the sandwich placement year, provided that the household income of that student remains £25,000 or less and the student remains in full time study. An NSP award student, who changes from full time study in 2014/15 to part time study in any subsequent year, will receive a scholarship in those years of part time study proportionate to their full time study load.

Students admitted to part time programmes at RHC in 2014/15 and who are selected for an NSP award, will receive a fee waiver which is proportionate to their full time study load. For example, a student studying 30 credits of study (0.25 FTE) in 2014/15 will be eligible for a fee waiver of £500, a student studying 60 credits (0.5 FTE) will be eligible for a fee waiver of £1,000, while a student studying 90 credits (0.75 FTE) will be eligible for a fee waiver of £1,500. Part time NSP students who continue their studies in 2015/16 and beyond will receive a scholarship in each subsequent year of study, proportionate to their full time study load, provided that the household income of that student remains £25,000 or less.

Reaseheath College Bursaries

RHC will award an annual non-repayable scholarship of £1,000 to those new entrants with a household income of £0 - £25,000 and who are not in receipt of a NSP award. Scholarships will be paid to students, by cheque or BACS, in two equal instalments. The first payment will be made in January and the second payment in May.

Students who receive a scholarship, including an NSP award, in the first year of study will continue to receive a £1,000 scholarship for the remaining years of study at RHC, provided that they remain registered on a full time course and continue to meet the criteria for the award of a scholarship. Students will not normally be eligible for a scholarship during the sandwich placement year.

Selection criteria for bursary awards:

- Student should have ticked the 'share' box on the SLC application
- Combined household income should be less than £25,000 per year
- Attendance should not drop below 90% (this will be audited in December by the finance office) prior to the first instalment of monies in January)

For 2013/14, the college will consult the student union about the NSP package available, along with other consultation activities such as focus groups with those students awarded financial support this academic year and HE course representatives. In discussion with students during curriculum forums in the first semester of 2012/13, there was a distinct view that cash bursaries provided students with more of an incentive than fee waivers in their capacity to impact upon access, retention and achievement.

One issue which did arise from these meetings was how the bursaries and NSP were marketed to students on campus and off campus (outside of education). Although a potentially low key approach

to marketing and promotion of the NSP was delivered in its infancy year in 2012/13, this did help to manage student expectation, especially where only a small number of those applying would be eligible for the award. college will, however, be liaising with its marketing team to ensure that information regarding NSP and bursaries are fully communicated to students, parents and industry liaisons.

4 College Targets and Milestones

- Maintain and improve baseline proportion of students from low participation groups or wards. In 2011/12, this was 17.67%. We have set a target for improvement to 19% by 2014/15.
- Monitor the percentage of students receiving bursaries. In the AY 2012/13, this was 52, but it is envisaged that this figure will increase progressively by 2% each year, targeting an 8% increase to 56 by 2014/15. Monitoring will be provisioned on an individual basis, but will be regularly discussed at academic board meetings.
- Improve the baseline of students with physical and or learning difficulties. In 2011/12, this figure was 12.9%. The college are working towards achieving a target of 13.7% by 2014/15, ascending to 14% by 2016/17. Learning support requirements will be closely monitored (and measured) through diagnostic/formative assessments; individual learning plans, DSA collaboration and enhanced tutorial provision via course managers.
- Monitor participation rates of 14-16 yr olds recruited onto collaborative vocational programmes, providing identified (signposted) progression pathways onto higher education. RHC will continue to develop and promote the benefits of higher education, by continuing and growing our outreach network. RHC are intending on achieving a 5% increase on this figure for 2014/15 to 315 students enrolling onto these programmes. The college will monitor the intake of 14 - 16 yrs old recruited onto our specialist vocational programmes on an annual basis, via MIS, Marketing and curriculum area reports.
- Monitor the participation of students identified as requiring additional support in prerequisite knowledge bases (e.g. science/practical skills). Departments such as Equine, provide students with low science attainment at their point of entry with additional support in the shape of summer schools, prior to the commencement of their programmes of study. RHC's commitment to monitor this provision will be provided by curriculum areas having identified students requiring additional learning support prior to the commencement to their programme of study. The college intends on increasing its student uptake in this activity over the next few years by up to 25%, assuming this support is identified and needed.
- Monitor progression for key groups such as Access to Higher Education programme, 2011/12 33 students from disadvantaged wards progressed to higher education. RHC will look to enhance progression figures by an additional 6% to 35 in 2014/15. Progression will be monitored through the use of annual course reports, module evaluations, curriculum group meetings (FE-progression and HE -retention) and course committee meetings.
- Continue to improve retention of students on higher education programmes. 2010/11 base line for student withdrawals was 17.3%. It is envisaged this will be reduced to 16% by

2014/15 through initiatives such as: enhanced course management support and tuition (HE Curriculum Area Manager role); tutorial and course file audits; learner voice provision in the form of student liaison meetings and course committee meetings; building on student survey responses and feedback; engagement with the VLE will also be enhanced, as well as meeting student expectations through increased monitoring of marketing materials, online prospectuses and course documentation.

- Improve the proportion of traditional 'non-white' students 2011/12 (1.86%) by 2016/17 to a target of 2.05% through widen HE provision to other catchment areas (geographically) as well as enhancing its brand name and reputation further afield (internationally) via increased marketing and student satisfaction.

5 Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

The Head of Higher Education, The Director of Quality and the Director of Finance will be responsible for the delivery of this agreement and the college is committed to monitor compliance and progress against the milestones. Progress will be measured throughout the year regarding key milestones, as part of the college's normal quality compliance/ assurance processes. The major targets /milestones relate to data collection and analysis. Progress being measured against targets set will be reported in an annual report to the colleges Higher Education academic board. The report will include:

- Financial data summarising recruitment, awards made to students via bursaries and awards.
- Outreach activities that have been undertaken during the year
- Progress made against institutional milestones and objectives relating to student success, progression and widening participation
- The College's Single Equality Scheme aims to proactively embed equality in the culture and systems of our organisation by ensuring that policy making, service delivery and employment practice are all equality orientated. A proactive and systematic approach to undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) is in place for existing and new policies.

Consulting with students

A preliminary draft of this agreement was shared with members of the Student Association at RHC through a routine meeting with the senior staff. Particular attention was given to the balance of available expenditure committed to supporting student success and financial support, and to the basis upon which financial support might best be organised. Subsequent input will come through student representative involvement in the Academic Board meetings at where this agreement is formally considered, approved and monitored.

6 Provision of Information to Students and Prospective Students

Information for students regarding financial information will be published by the college and provided to students. This information will also appear on the college web site. Illustrations of the

net costs of study at RHC will be included, including examples of living on site in halls of residence and the cost of living off campus. This information also appears in the college KIS.

Information is also included regarding support both academic and pastoral available at the college. For existing students the college has a dedicated student finance officer and proactive student services team that are housed in a bespoke building providing dedicated advice and guidance to existing students.

For prospective students, the college holds open days, taster courses, bridging courses and attends education fairs, schools and college career days and other events relevant to recruitment. At all these events printed information is available regarding the colleges position on tuition fees, the NSP and other forms of financial support.

Information regarding tuition fees and financial support available will be sent to all applicants receiving an offer of a place.

Perspective students seeking admission to courses are normally interviewed. During the applicants interview visit to RHC there is an opportunity to discuss financial support and what this is likely to be available from the institution.

All staff involved in recruitment and admissions will receive on going updates and training regarding tuition fees and scholarships. Information will also be made available on UCAS

The college provides IAG, Information, advice and guidance to perspective and existing students and is the holder of full MATRIX accreditation.

In summary, RHC is committed to removing barriers to Higher Education, whether they are physical, social, cultural or financial. We continue to work with schools and the community, as well as providing support to internal students wishing to progress to higher education, we are committed to monitoring our progress.