

Access Agreement

2018/19

Parent Organisation of

Rotherham College
North Notts College
Dearne Valley College

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RNN Group Access Agreement 2018-19

1. Aims and Purpose of the Agreement

The purpose of this agreement is to set out rationale and justification for charging fees above £6165 at RNN Group above the basic fee level. This agreement also explains the methods of evaluation of impact of, improvements in the educational outcomes of students from a variety of backgrounds and groups who have not traditionally participated in Higher Education.

This Access Agreement relates to the setting of fees for UK students entering Higher Education programmes at RNN Group, including Rotherham College, North Notts College, and Dearne Valley College for 2018-19.

The Access Agreement outlines the College's continuing commitment to widening access by providing equal opportunity for students to participate in education and succeed. The College continues to focus on the strategic aims of the National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education, driving forward change, which focuses on the student lifecycle, from access, retention, student success and progression to further study or to/within employment.

This agreement has been completed in consultation with the Higher Education study body at RNN Group. The monitoring of access agreements and milestones will continue to have student representation.

2. Higher Education at RNN Group

RNN Group has gone through two mergers in the past two calendar years. In February 2016, Rotherham College and North Notts merged to create the RNN Group, supporting the communities of Rotherham, North Notts, and Bassetlaw and the surrounding areas. After Area Reviews, it was decided a further merger with Dearne Valley in February 2017 would see the final iteration of the RNN Group.

Higher Education at RNN Group is taught on the Worksop, Rotherham, Dinnington, and Dearne Valley campuses, with a total population of 561 HE students as of April 2017. RNN Group runs HNC/Ds, CertEds, PGCEs, Foundation and First Degrees, with three validating partners: University of Hull, Sheffield Hallam University, and Pearson.

Dearne Valley had its own access agreement for 2016-17, while Rotherham and North Notts Colleges have not had their own access agreements. As such, this agreement will be the first for two of the three main sites, and for RNN Group as a single entity.

3. The Local Area

The RNN Group serves a local community of 374,200 people of which 76.7% of the individuals are economically active. The Group operates from 5 main sites, the North Nottinghamshire Campus in Worksop, the Rotherham Campus, Dinnington Campus and the Rawmarsh Road and Shire Oaks Centres which are focused on construction trades. In the area served by the Group economic inactivity is 1.9% above the national average and the average wage is 9.3% lower than the national average for salaried staff and 8.8% lower for hourly paid. Full time employment in the area is higher than the national average with 71.8% of the jobs available being full-time against a national average of 67.7%. The largest employers are within the public sector followed by manufacturing, finance and IT and then distribution.

Levels of academic attainment for the area are all below the national average and individuals with no qualifications are above the national average as detailed below.

Level	Bassetlaw	Rotherham	Great Britain
NVQ 4 equivalent and above	20.4%	23.1%	36.0%
NVQ 3 equivalent	33.5%	48.1%	56.7%
NVQ 2 equivalent	64.6%	69.1%	73.3%
NVQ 1 equivalent	81.4%	83.9%	85.0%
No Qualifications	11.2%	9.9%	8.8%

(Source: Nomis December 2014)

In 2015 the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at A*-C, including English and Mathematics in Rotherham was above the national average at 57.3% but this was a drop on the previous year. This position also masks the issue that pupils in disadvantaged communities are actually gaining fewer passes and there are falling levels of achievement. In North Nottinghamshire the picture is 58% which is again above the national average. Higher Education entry in Bassetlaw and Rotherham is polarised with young people in the least deprived areas being 3 times more likely to access Higher Education than those from the most deprived areas (44% versus 15%).

The catchment areas of Rotherham, North Notts, and Dearne Valley have traditionally low levels of participation and aspiration. To try and address this situation and enhance recruitment RNN Group undertakes HE outreach activity with 11-16 years old schools, Sixth Form schools/colleges, and FE partners in the Dearne Valley, Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster boroughs. Across most of these areas, there are a significant number of communities with high levels of social and economic deprivation with second and third generation family members being economically inactive.

4. The Agreement

Fees

This Access Agreement provides the basis target setting and analysis of progress for the period from September 2018 through to August 2021. HE fees will be reviewed on an annual basis and reflect inflationary increases and any College additional expenditure that contributes to wider local school, community and business promotion and awareness of HE access, opportunities and progression.

	2018-2019
Annual Tuition Fee Year 1	£7,500.00
Annual Tuition Fee Year 2	£7,500.00
RNN Group Bursary value based upon the criteria set out below.	£400.00

*The £7,500 Annual Tuition Fee and maximum £400 bursary is subject to review on an annual basis within the OFFA Access Agreement submission process from 2019-2020 to 2021-2022.

**Tuition fees are subject to inflation each academic year.

Level of fees

- The level of fee for full time HE provision for new entrants in 2018-2019 will be £7,500.
- The level of fee for part time HE provision for new entrants in 2018-2019 will be £5,000.
- HE fees set at the beginning of the HE provision will remain in effect for the duration of the named HE programme (up to a maximum of two years for full time students undertaking two-year programmes).
- Only first year HE students with a fee level above £6,000 will be eligible for the RNN Group HE bursary payment up to £400. Starting from 2019-2020, Year 2 and 3 students will be provided with opportunities for Continuous Professional Development in a field related to their qualification.

Student numbers

The estimated number of learners that will fall into the fees and bursary rates, highlighted above, for 2018-2019, are as follows:

- HNC (Full-time) - 39
- HNC (Part-time) - 56
- Level 4 FD (Full-time) - 79
- Level 4 FD (Part-time) – 131
- First Degree (Full-time) – 70
- First Degree (Part-time) - 14
- PGCE (Part-time) - 5
- CertHE (Part-time) - 7
- Franchised (Full-time) - 15

2018-2019 bursary support for full time HE students

Qualifying Criteria		Bursary
1	Any first year HE student (with fees above £6165) who has progressed from a Further Education College, Sixth Form College and/or school	Up to £400.00 in value for the first year of study to support the development through personal IT or through related equipment/resources
2	Any first year HE student (with fees above £6165) who is or has been employed within the Sheffield City Region	From 2019-20, Year 2 and 3 students will receive bursary support for Continuous Professional Development, related to the relevant area of study.

All full time first year HE students who qualify for a bursary will receive IT equipment and/or resources to the maximum value of £400.00, subject to 80% or better attendance at the point of the bursary being awarded.

5. Attainment Raising, Access and Student Success

Attainment Raising

To promote attainment raising in the local area, RNN Group will commit to working closely with the Rotherham and North Notts Councils to support local primary schools in the development of Maths and English, as a particular focus. By working with the councils RNN Group will be able to more closely focus on the needs of the community through the information gathered by the councils on areas of further improvement that RNN Group can be of focused support.

Activities

To help support people in the above areas, the College will promote and run awareness raising events and activities in the community and local schools and as part of our employer engagement activities to promote HE and higher-level skills provision at RNN Group. A strategy has been to utilise our validating organisations to articulate progression routes and career paths that are available, at open evenings and events. Feedback from such events have been extremely positive and may be a contributing factor in the current growth of the College's HE provision. In addition, the College has adapted an additional strategy of working with local employers and providing free training to employees, as a taster for HE. This has been particularly effective around our Childhood Studies provision, where a number of local childcare settings have been able to utilise these events for their employees. The full impact of this strategy should become evident in next year's recruitment figures, where we will expect an increase in our HE student numbers. More recent developments have seen the College's developments into Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, which will allow further access to the market of already employed individuals. The College's access strategy for HE reaches down to

younger groups being invited to HE Taster days. Typically, these events target Year 9 and 10 students from schools that are representative of the 'cold spots' for HE recruitment.

The 16-18 years old support and promotional activities with level 2 and level 3 College learners is undertaken through tutorials and supported by Progress Coaches, who are attached to each curriculum area. Increasing our outreach activities and resources will be used to enhance the existing activities and target 'cold spots' in partnership with Sheffield City Region Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP), and the recently formed and HEFCE funded, Sheffield City Region Network for Collaborative Outreach, known as HEPP & CO. A clear demonstration of this strategy is shown through the use of the HEPP Outreach bus that targets local 'cold spots', as well as visiting the College itself. In addition, the College has previously employed a Graduate Intern, part of whose role was to target potential provider schools, with a clear agenda to maximise our Widening Participation priorities. This role will be advertised once funding via HEPP has been devolved.

Access Measures

A range of Access activities are undertaken to promote Higher Education at the College which include specific HE curriculum tasters, Presentation evenings/talks, UCAS application activities, Student finance activities, HE open evenings, Progression boards and Careers events.

Over the next three years the College is committed to maintaining the drive to increase HE participation by developing access routes for HE study for adults and providing the development of higher level skills for employers and employees, whilst continuing to support HE progression for young people from schools and colleges. Furthermore, the College has moved most of its' HE provision to FD or Hons degree. Part of this move has been to maximise progression routes from level 3 provision, such as Access to Nursing, with long-term progression routes articulated within the awarding institutions' offers. In these instances, the awarding institutions provide a wide range of professional career pathways, giving the learner structured direction in terms of potential careers.

The cornerstone for the proposed HE development will be feedback and partnerships with local and city region employers and in supporting the higher levels skills requirements of the Sheffield City Region's Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Plan.

The majority of HE students recruited onto full time HE programmes are existing RNN Group FE students who have progressed internally and live within the catchment areas of the College.

Student Success

Overall pass rates for students studying on Higher Education programmes at RNN Group have increased to 87.8% for 2015-2016 with achievement being 97.51%.

Improvements in overall success rates have been assisted through the implementation of study skills support, which all HE learners are encouraged to access. Alongside this, a HE study skills coach has been employed, with the dual role of additional support for study skills and providing additional support for learners in terms of exploring relevant progression opportunities. This has been particularly enhanced on the Sports programmes, where a clear progression route through to level 6 has enhanced motivation in this curricular area. Additionally, increased stringency has been placed on entry requirements, which have improved the suitability of learners on HE programmes.

Improving student success has been assisted with the improved quality and enhancement of student learner opportunities, which was commended during the Dearne Valley College 2014 QAA visit and report. Additionally, further enrichment themes were highly praised by the QAA report, particularly around utilisation of on-line VLE related resources. This is complimented by RNN Group adopting Dearne Valley College's 2017/18 Access Agreement commitment to providing learners with an electronic tablet as part of their bursary, which not only enhances the learners experience, but also allows full access to the VLE resources provided by RNN Group as part of the electronic enhancement commended by QAA and fully utilised across all RNN Group campuses. These commendations by QAA underlie the support networks that are provided by RNN Group for its HE students.

Specified Targeted Cohorts

Further work is needed to identify specific aims to analyse the amount of participation amongst targeted students. As an example, as we begin to our tutoring programme, grade analysis and student number targets will be identified and recorded.

We are working towards raising attainment in increasing student marks across all subject areas for further academic achievement for all HE students within the OFFA target group.

As RNN Group is a member of both South Yorkshire's and the Humber's HEPP agreements, we are actively working with fellow colleges in discussing best practice activities and evaluative opportunities.

The initial evaluation process will be to identify the number of participants to identify a threshold for future evaluative activities. Likewise, we will create a database of marks for those in the OFFA target group and monitor variations in marks twice a year.

6. Financial support

All full time first year HE students who qualify for a bursary will receive IT equipment to the maximum value of £400.00, subject to 80% or better attendance at the point of the bursary being awarded.

Where students have a desire to access P/T work, a careers coach is provided to support this outcome.

Financial support through bursaries will be provided to first year students (Level 4) on selected programmes who live in certain postcodes (postcodes designated quintiles 1&2 by HE Qualifications Quintile postcodes) and have low household incomes indicated by receiving full student finance. Each September the criteria for bursary will be published for the academic year in question. It will detail income thresholds, qualifying postcodes and course types and the number of grants available.

Hardship grants will be provided based on income and expenditure details. These can be requested throughout the year and a committee make decisions on an individual basis after reviewing evidence provided by the applicant.

The effectiveness of all forms of financial support will be monitored closely. The use of qualitative and quantitative survey of recipients will be used alongside statistical testing to measure impact of the financial support.

The financial support given to our HE students will be evaluated during the course of the first academic year of the OFFA agreement to evaluate how it has improved the outcomes for under-represented and disadvantaged students. We will collect data based on student feedback surveys and focus groups. The first year will look at improving student access to research capabilities online and electronic resources, such as Word and Excel for assignments.

Further data will be collected in the second academic year of the OFFA agreement as the financial support will go towards supporting professional development opportunities for students that are outside of the classroom.

However, if it is identified that after the first academic year the financial support of IT equipment does not have a major positive effect on students, then the professional development of year 2 and 3 opportunities will be given to first year students, as a means of transferring the financial support to better support our students.

7. Fee Level and Spending from 2018/19

For the academic year 2018/19 fees for new students on full time programmes will be set at a maximum of £7500. This applies to Pre-Service Certificate in Education, Foundation Degree, honours, top up programmes for Higher National Certificates and Diploma courses.

Fees for part time study will be calculated based on the full time equivalent fees. The maximum amount a part time student could pay is £5000.

In 2018/19, RNN Group is committed to spending a minimum of 25-35% of the additional income on activities to benefit access, success and progression of non-traditional higher education learners. The first year will spend around 85% due to the small cohort of students in the first instance. We wish to introduce our expenditure structure as it will stand when all three HE academic years are covered in the agreement; however, the first year of the OFFA agreement will only cover first year students, so the amount spent will be a higher percentage for the first year, reducing in a steady state until year three of the OFFA agreement.

During 2018/19, RNN Group will spend 35% on access activities for those in the catchment areas of RNN Group. This relates to government targets regarding participation of individuals from POLAR 3. Again, this is based on only first year HE students in the first instance. The percentage will reduce to 15-20% when we cover all three HE student years under the OFFA agreement. The remaining funding will be split between progression and student success activities and support for RNN Group higher education students.

8. Expenditure of additional fee income

The College will continue to direct additional revenue obtained from increased fees to support Higher Education teaching and learning.

Investment will continue as follows:

- Continuing to develop a range of Foundation Degrees and First Degrees, that meet the needs of industry, particularly in the region.
- Review of portfolio and individual programmes to consider teaching, learning and assessment strategies most appropriate for the profile of learners when including high levels of non-traditional entry students and those with some form of learning disability.
- Provide activity aimed at deprived communities recruiting to all RNN Group campuses
- Through outreach activities as previously outlined.
- Through providing specialist resources dedicated to enhancing the higher education teaching and learning experience.
- Provide targeted resources to improve retention, particularly on Foundation Degrees.
- Continue to develop applied research activities linking student projects to industry.
- Continued development of a range of progression activities for Level 3 learners post offer days, information days and study skills training.
- Continue to develop flexible study modes on Foundation Degrees to enable access to a wider range of learners.

In view of the expected, though unknown reduction rates of the student opportunity funding a number of retention methods will become embedded within the academic aspect of the curriculum to mitigate against reduced funding for central functions. The changes to financial support on offer will enable students to apply for hardship funding where support is still needed but this will be limited once the funds have been allocated.

9. Activities to support progression to further study or employment

A range of activities will take place to support these and, as an indicative list, include the following:

- Advice and guidance sessions on an individual basis and via group tutorials for both employment and further study.
- Events aimed at specific sector employment linked to our curriculum areas.
- Employer days on campus where opportunities for employment are discussed with those already in work and or offering opportunities for work.

- Develop resources evidencing the learning journey from level 1 through to postgraduate, aligned to employment opportunities across the portfolio.
- opportunities and Apprenticeship provision.
- Showcase event open to external guests highlighting our final level students' achievements.
- Guidance in paper, electronic and verbal form on finance options for further study.
- Subsidised additional qualifications on some programmes.
- Subsidised industry related trips, visits and study tours.

Whilst the balance of spend is weighted towards access and retention activities, progression data as per DLHE data.

10. Monitoring Arrangements

The Director of Higher Education & Skills will present Access Agreement bi-annual reports to the College Senior Leadership Team on the progress of the milestones. Monitoring information will be provided through the HEFCE and OFFA Student Access Agreement and Student Opportunities Assessment monitoring process. HE fees and Access Agreement revision will be scrutinised by the College's Senior Leadership Team and validated by the College's governing body.

The HE action plan will outline areas for development and improvement at a college and curriculum level that will provide the HE student data for the monitoring of Access Agreement milestones. The HE action plan and HE Strategy will be monitored and reported on by the HE Department. The annual Student Opportunity and Access Agreement Assessment will be undertaken by the Director of Higher Education & Skills working with the Director of Funding and Contracts.

Changes in HE fees and bursaries will be approved and validated at a full governing body board to meet the annual OFFA Access Agreement submission process.

11. Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity is re-enforced throughout all our HE programmes. This takes the form of regular curriculum meetings, which will address a range of issues for HE learners and where issues around Equality and Diversity are high on the agenda. Additionally, Equality and Diversity form an integral part of our Teaching Learning and Assessment process, to which all HE staff are subject to.

Inequalities in success rates are monitored closely as part of the Self-Assessment process and where particular issues arise, these are addressed as part of the Quality Improvement Process. Equality Impact Assessments are monitored and measured by the Equality and Diversity group, which applies to HE programmes, as well as other areas of the College. The HE Learning and Teaching Committee address Equality and Diversity issues as a matter of course and it is embedded in all working practices relating to HE. Where necessary, learners are provided with specific support to access the Disabled Students Allowance and the College implements any recommended actions.

The financial support for HE students, as identified above, will be a part of the planned support for students left in the shortfall under the changes to the Disabled Students' Allowance. Further evaluation will be conducted to identify the amount of the shortfall. This will affect future OFFA financial agreements as RNN Group will ensure we cover the shortfall, but the amount is not clear as of yet.

12. Provision of Information to Students

HE programme fee information and details of the bursary will be made available to all prospective HE students throughout the information, application and recruitment process. It will clearly explain HE tuition fees and the RNN Group Access Agreement bursary scheme alongside other financial information, advice and guidance for prospective HE students.

This information will be provided in a range of formats and state the annual and aggregate fees for the HE programme, bursary arrangements and other financial support available. This will allow

prospective students to foresee levels of debt incurred resulting from fees by the end of the course. The information will be provided via:

- The College website
- Higher Education prospectus;
- College HE and FE staff;
- Student Support Services at the College;
- HE and Higher Level Skills careers events with our local partner institutions, schools and employers;
- Internal briefings to level 2 and 3 learners through progression sessions, particularly level 3 learners;
- All appropriate RNN Group events for prospective/interested learners, parents, employers and external agencies;
- Open Evenings for adults, HE advice sessions and HE interviews;
- Engagement with employers to outline workforce development through part time HE and higher level skills.

13. Consulting with Students

The College has a learner involvement strategy that establishes how and when the College seeks to ascertain the views of students. The strategy also highlights how feedback is then utilised as an element of the annual planning, review and self-assessment processes, to inform improvements. Some of these improvements have occurred throughout the content of this report. This takes the form of a number of student forums, that are scheduled throughout the academic year. Feedback from these are acted upon at programme and strategic level, with feedback used to inform any changes to programme structure. Representatives from each HE programme that the College delivers are represented at the scheduled student forums. Each event has a set agenda, addressing issues around curriculum, the learning environment, value for money, IT facilities and general resources. Module evaluations are also completed with the feedback utilised to improve provision.

The initial planning of the access agreement began with student focus groups at secondary schools local to the Rotherham/Bassetlaw area. The students were asked for their views on what they felt were priorities in future HE studies, be that financial support or academic tutoring, for example.

We will continue to survey current students on their financial support needs to better target financial allocations to our students. We will survey students all three HE academic years, as well as, our FE students. Each academic year may have different financial requirements. Likewise, FE students may be able to inform RNN Group of financial difficulties that will affect their application into HE.

14. Assessment and Evaluation of Activities

We will be targeting mature students, students with disabilities, and under-represented students. We will be evaluating the impact of our interventions at two points in the academic year, at the mid-year and end-year points. This way we can better identify when we have affected change in the academic year for our students with our interventions.

Below is an outline of our commitments to analyse/evaluate in the future as we have not monitored these activities in the past:

- a. We will use this year's data to create benchmarks for future evaluations
- b. Identify priorities based on findings
- c. Develop activities that target the above priorities
- d. Evaluations to occur at mid-year and end-year points to assess disparities at different stages of the lifecycle, across all three HE academic years
- e. Activities will establish measures of achievement for the success of the OFFA agreement

Milestones

September 2017: Baseline first year full time students who are resident in the RNN Group (cold-spot locations)

April 2018: Revised 2018-2022 Access Agreement with associated bursary values and HE fee elements confirmed by College governing body;

September 2018: Increase first year full time students resident in the RNN Group (cold-spot locations)

March 2019: HE Access Agreement reviewed with bursary value and fee elements reviewed and confirmed for 2019-2020;

September 2019: Increase the number of first year full time students resident in the RNN Group (cold-spot locations)

March 2020: HE Access Agreement reviewed with bursary value and fee elements reviewed and confirmed for 2020-2021;

September 2020: Increase the number of first year full time students resident in the RNN Group (cold-spot locations)

March 2021: HE Access Agreement reviewed with bursary value and fee elements reviewed and confirmed for 2021-2022;

September 2021: Increase the number of first year full time students resident in the RNN Group (cold-spot locations).