

Access Agreement

2019/20

Parent Organisation of

Rotherham College
North Notts College
Dearne Valley College
and
University Centre Rotherham

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RNN Group Access Agreement 2019-20

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 2019-20.

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 student 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, over the course of 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 597 HE students as of April 2018. RNN Group runs HNC/Ds, CertEds, PGCEs, Foundation and First Degrees, with four validating partners: University of Hull, Sheffield Hallam University, Pearson, and Teesside University (currently in teach-out).

3. The Local Area

Our areas are experiencing a steep demographic decline in 16-18s, which will reverse substantially, but that does not begin until 2019-20. The 18-21 cohort locally will thus decline until around 2022.

However, at present the percentage participation in higher education in our areas is significantly below national average, indicating that with the right development there is latent demand from people who could, and who the economy needs to, study above level 3.

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 2019 through to August 2022. 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.

	2019-20
Annual Tuition Fee Year 1	£6,900.00
Annual Tuition Fee Year 2	£6,900.00
RNN Group Bursary value based upon the criteria set out below.	£200.00

*The £6,900 Annual Tuition Fee and maximum £200 bursary is subject to review on an annual basis within the OFFA Access Agreement submission process from 2020-2021 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 2019-2020 will be £6,900.
- The level of fee for part time HE provision for new entrants in 2019-20 will be £4,400.
- 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 £200. Starting from 2020-21, 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 2019-20, are as follows:

- HNC (Full-time) - 42
- HNC (Part-time) - 58
- Level 4 FD (Full-time) - 83
- Level 4 FD (Part-time) – 127
- First Degree (Full-time) – 76
- First Degree (Part-time) - 17
- PGCE (Part-time) - 6
- CertHE (Part-time) - 6
- Franchised (Full-time) - 20

2019-20 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 £200.00 in value for the first year of study to support the development through a financial grant to allow the learners to pay for books/materials/etc.
2	Any first year HE student (with fees above £6165) who is or has been employed within the Sheffield City Region	From 2020-21, 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 a financial grant in order to purchase equipment/books/materials that would benefit their individual academic and/or personal needs while in education. The bursary would be up to £200, subject to 90% or better attendance by the end of the first semester of their course.

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.

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.

Through our partnership with HeppSY+, we have two Graduate Interns that permanently work from our three colleges, offering widening access opportunities to our Further Education learners. They remain impartial to RNN Group as we wish to continue with supporting widening access opportunities to our local student population.

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 from 87.8% in 2015-2016, to 89% in 2016-17. In addition, our achievement rate has remained strong with a 96% rating for 2016-17.

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 a bursary to support the learners during their studies. These commendations by QAA underlie the support networks that are provided by RNN Group for its HE students.

6. Financial support

All full time first year HE students who qualify for a bursary will receive a financial grant to the maximum value of £200.00, subject to 90% or better attendance at the end of their first semester of their studies at RNN Group.

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.

7. Fee Level and Spending from 2019/20

For the academic year 2019/20 fees for new students on full time programmes will be set at a maximum of £6,900. 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 £4,400.

In 2019/20, RNN Group is committed to spending a minimum of 15-20% of the additional income on activities to benefit access, success and progression of non-traditional higher education learners. During 2019/20, RNN Group will spend 1/3 on access activities for those in the catchment areas of RNN Group. This relates to government targets regarding participation of individuals from POLAR 3.

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 Office for Students 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.

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.