

South-Thames College

Access Agreement 2017-18

Information about the College

The College submitted and had approved a 2016-17 Access Agreement. To date no students have been recruited at the higher fee level (1st intake Sept 2016).

The College is a large general further education (FE) college and is one of the largest providers of education and training in London. Following a highly successful merger with Merton College in 2009, the College has main campuses in Wandsworth, Merton and Tooting.

The College enrolled a total 18,300 learners in 2013/14 on a mix of accredited and non- accredited programmes ranging from pre-entry to degree level. The continuing aim of the College is to deliver flexible, high-quality, learner centred and business focused education and training that responds to the cultural diversity of the community, enriches lives and contributes to economic prosperity.

The College serves some of the most deprived wards in southwest London with centres in Wandsworth, Merton and Tooting. Most of the College's students live locally. Approximately 75% of the students live in areas classified as being socially disadvantaged (43% for HE). 45% of HE students are female and approximately 75% of are from minority ethnic groups.

The Colleges own HE provision is primarily Pearson validated HN programmes. There is a smaller amount of franchised Foundation Degree, and very small amount of postgraduate (on run-out).

With the government policy to extend full-time places in HE and 'open up the market', the College received a full-time allocation but limited to 45 places. From 2015/16, there ceased to be a limit on full-time places, moving forward this will enable the College to respond accordingly to local need moving forward.

The College reserves the right to increase fees over the period of this Access Agreement as follows:

- Below the basic fee Level in 16-17 – in line with market forces and/or inflation. (Should this result in courses going over the basic fee threshold OFFA will be consulted)
- Above the basic fee level in 16-17 – as permitted by Government

College Mission

In July 2014, the College updated its mission statement to emphasise a core remit to provide vocational education and training to support progression to employment and further learning. The 'Strategic Plan 2014-17'¹ sets out the mission statement, which is:

'Leading excellence in learning for jobs and careers'. This is supported by the vision statement, 'At South Thames College, we aim to be the leading college for career- focused education and training. Our goal is to motivate and challenge learners to achieve excellence and to progress within a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Our curriculum is shaped continually by the best industry relationships and we are a professional team who lead an innovative and outstanding student experience. We are a publicly valued stakeholder and a leading contributor to the local and London community.'

The College is underpinned by 3 simple core values:

- *Learning*
- *Excellence*
- *Teamwork*

The Strategic Plan also sets out 5 strategic priorities:

- *An Outstanding Student Experience*
- *An industry-led ethos of learning and teaching*
- *At the forefront of jobs and careers in London*
- *A talented staff of leading professionals*
- *A financially sustainable future*

Fees

The College undertakes to publish clear and accessible information on the level of fees and financial support offered. This will be done primarily through the College website and prospectus (which will clearly state which year published fees apply to). The College further undertakes to provide timely and accurate fee information to UCAS and the SLC.

The large majority of HE courses offered will have fees below the basic level. All students on FT Pearson HNs will be charged between £4250 and £4950 PA. Students on FD courses are franchised numbers and therefore fall outside the scope of this agreement (but are currently charged £4950). Students on the new BSc Live Sound and Studio Engineering will be charged £9000 PA.

Fees for part-time students will not be higher than £4,500 PA.

Access, Progression and Student Success

The College aims to spend £30,000 (£20,500 OFFA countable) in 2017-18 rising to £39,000 (£31,000 OFFA countable) in 2020-21 on access/success & progression measures.

The breakdown of this is as follows.

- Progression: total OFFA Countable spend to be £4,000 in 17-18 rising to £7,000 in 20-21.
- Student Success: Total OFFA Countable spend to be £4,500 in 17-18 rising to £7,000 in 20-21.
- Access: total OFFA Countable spend to be £12,000 in 17-18 rising to £17,000 in 19-20.

This expenditure will be focused on four main areas:

1. Improving non-continuation rates for both FT and PT students (Progression)
2. Developing collaborative partnerships in order to widen access (Access)
3. Developing new flexible blended learning provision specifically to appeal to mature and non-standard entrants. (Access)
4. Funding for student hardship payments to students eligible for higher level maintenance loans (residual household income up to £42,620 in 14-15). These payments will be available annually.
5. Maintaining the % of male students at 55%, and increasing the % of white male students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In terms of progression, continuation rates for both FT and PT students were 68% and 54% respectively in 2013-14. A new student ILP and tracking system which has been very effective in increasing retention and achievement at FE level will be initially trialled and subsequently rolled out to all HE provision in future years. Allied to this will be additional tutorial sessions where students can work with staff to set and review individualised targets. These additional sessions will be funded from fee income, as will staff training and the additional costs of developing and maintaining specific HE content and features within the system.

For outreach the College has a good network of local School partners which helps facilitate progression to HE, but will further strengthen this through firstly part funding a widening participation coordinator with a specific remit to develop and deliver collaborative projects with local schools and other providers, and to undertake raising aspiration visits (as below). The College will also become an active member of Aim Higher South London. Fee income will be used to initially participate in and subsequently host the HE in FE event offered to all member schools and colleges for year 12 students. This event

offers students an insight into the benefits of studying college based HE, and includes the opportunity for pupils to engage with college HE student ambassadors. Additional income will allow for both the membership costs, and the staff resource required to participate in the range of events offered by AHSL. Over and above this fee income will be used to fund a minimum of 20 raising aspiration school visits per year, and at least 10 taster sessions for local school children with particular focus on underrepresented groups such as females in engineering. Some of these projects will be targeted at year 9 pupils with a view to building long term relationships with potential students.

Targets and Milestones

The College is committed to getting the best value from its spend, and set itself the following targets:

- To improve the non-continuation rates for part-time HE by 12%; and full-time by 12% over a 5 year period
- To recruit a total of 40 non-traditional/mature students per year by 2017-18 to a distance learning HNC in Business Management.
- To roll out the ProMonitor student ILP/student tracking system to HE students by 2017-18
- To be active members of Aim Higher South London.

Equality and Diversity

The College has developed this Access Agreement to meet the legislative context of the Equality Act 2010. The Equality and Diversity Board terms of reference reflect the social, moral and legal responsibilities of Equality Act 2010. The Act underpins the College's inclusive ethos and operational delivery to ensure that no one is directly or indirectly discriminated against because of their protected characteristic.

South Thames College is committed to ensuring equality in all that it does. The College celebrates and values the diversity brought to its workforce by individuals, and believes that the College will benefit from attracting and retaining staff and learners from a variety of backgrounds. The College expects all staff, volunteers and those contracted to provide services to share this commitment.

The College has developed its equality and diversity policy to enable the achievement of its aim of promoting Equalities and Diversity and achieving the strategic objective of 'vigorously promoting equality and diversity and challenging discriminatory practice in all aspects of the College's work.'

The College's higher education provision is delivered out of the Wandsworth campus. In the borough of Wandsworth the BAME percentage of the

population is 25% (London Ave 40%, 2011 census). The College's HE provision is by comparison 75% BAME.

UCAS and HESA data clearly shows that women are more likely to enter HE than men. At South Thames College the HE student cohort is 55% male, compared to circa 44% reported in 2012-13 HESA data. Approximately 43% of HE students live in areas classified as being socially disadvantaged (Ward uplift field in ILR)

The College actively promotes equality throughout its sphere of operation. The Equality and Diversity Boards reviews achievement data annually in relation to achievement gaps, implementing actions as appropriate.

Monitoring and evaluation

Ultimately the College's Corporation will monitor strategic progress towards meeting targets set in this Access Agreement, Whilst the Senior Management Team (SLT) will oversee the operational monitoring and evaluation of the Access Agreement. Data will be produced by College Information Services, and an annual evaluative report prepared by the Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum for consideration initially by SLT, and subsequently by Corporation. If progress towards meeting targets is not satisfactory, appropriate actions will be taken. In all cases monitoring will be evidence based and consider progress against specific targets, and also against the general progress being made within the sector.

Student Consultation

This Access Agreement has been shared with the HE student forum, which is the College's primary consultative mechanism for HE matters. The Agreement has been partially amended in light of feedback received.

Provision of Information for Students

The College commits to publish clear information on fees and financial support and to provide timely information to UCAS and the Student Loans Company. Information on fees and financial support will be published on the College website, in prospectuses and on the UCAS website.