

## **ACCESS AGREEMENT ROYAL AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE 2010**

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#### Tuition Fees

The College will continue to charge the full variable tuition fee of £3290 for all undergraduate courses apart from the Foundation Degree in Business (which will be charged at £1315) in order to provide the necessary resourcing for teaching and learning and for widening access (as detailed in Annex 1).

#### Background

As a small (900 students) rural, specialist institution, Widening Participation has been an area of challenge since joining the Publicly Funded Sector in 2001. The College has moved from being a privately funded institution with a need to charge full tuition fees, to a publicly funded institution with a more diverse student body.

The College has been successful since that time in increasing student numbers at a time when the number of students on land-based Courses across the sector has been falling. The diversity of the student body has also changed dramatically. The College now has 30% of its students receiving support for tuition fees and 25% on full support, an increase of 5% since 2001. 60% of undergraduates are from state schools. The original widening participation activities (Annex 2) were aimed at rural disadvantaged areas, mature students and part time study. There has been some success, but this has been constrained by the small target market, and our rural location has made part time study difficult to promote successfully. These existing widening participation activities are continuing alongside new target activities, which are aligned with target groups presented by Aimhigher, HEFCE and the DfES.

#### Widening Access

At present local recruitment is limited despite our continued and expanding participation in Aim Higher and collaboration with Cirencester College, the Regional Foundation Degree Consortium and Schools and FE Colleges within the Cirencester area. We continue to direct resources into raising our profile locally, through targeted marketing and increasing opportunities to access the College through Schools and College liaison, and community and businesses engagement. The additional income generated by variable fees has enabled the College to employ a Widening Participation (formally Access) Officer with the necessary experience to assist the College in attracting and retaining students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. This additional resource also enabled us to offer incentive payments to staff involved in outreach work, although as widening participation initiatives have become increasingly embedded across the institution over the past two years, there has been increased drive for staff to participate and offer activities voluntarily.

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Our identified, most under-represented groups remain as local, young, urban, low-income, and ethnic minority. We are aware that “Applicants from places with little or no tradition of HE attendance are 25% more likely to study at a local University within 30 minutes travel of home”. [Higher Education Funding Council (2005). *Young participation in higher education*. (03)]

Swindon is only 15 miles away, has less than 26% HE attendance and is a primary target. Our increased engagement over the last two years has shown that students in the local area have little or no awareness of the opportunities available to them at the College. We have confirmed that we have a great deal more work ahead of us to raise both aspirations towards, and awareness of, the very different learning opportunities that the College has to offer. We also continue to concentrate our efforts on South Bristol and Gloucester, which also have a high proportion of low-income young students. Another engagement area, although not in the lowest HE attendance bracket, is the Forest of Dean, which is a disadvantaged rural area. We will build on our successes and continue to expand our engagement with all these target zones. All of these areas have a large population, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds where studying at HE level would not be a high priority. The College will also continue to promote the opportunity to follow non-rural pathways leading to a wider range of careers in the rural economy, the food chain and the property sector.

The College continues to concentrate on promoting and developing programmes with more appeal to our most under-represented groups (young, urban, low income and ethnic minority) and has put additional resources into promoting the BSc Property Agency and Marketing and the Foundation Degree in Property Agency and Surveying, both programmes providing professional accreditation from the RICS. We have been successful with, and will continue to promote, our suite of Business Management programmes (at Foundation or BSc Honours level), which may also have wider appeal. With national media focus on Food topics, it is also apt that we have also developed a new Degree in Food Production and Supply Management, which will appeal to a wider audience and benefit from media stimulation. We will also provide as much additional resource for new programme development as possible.

We are producing specialist promotional materials aimed at these groups and areas, and the Widening Participation Officer is responsible for assisting our existing Admissions Team in recruiting students from these areas. We have increased, and will continue to increase, our local school visits and we are running additional recruitment events at College to bring students to our campus.

The College is resourcing, where necessary, additional support mechanisms for those students who may require a different approach to learning and more assistance in embedding themselves into higher education and the rural campus environment.

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We are still working to the original five-year plan in which we set realistic but challenging targets and will be working to continue and expand the activities into a further five year period.

### **Aimhigher**

We are utilising Aim Higher and Outreach contacts, and a contextual statement for Aim Higher is attached (Annex 3). To date this has resulted in the appointment and training of Student Ambassadors for the past three years; an Aim Higher event run at the College which provided an introduction to opportunities of Higher Education, the land based sector and rural pathways to Year 9 students from schools within our target areas; delivery of a series of Enrichment Days, which link directly to the National Curriculum and offer a day of 'enhanced' learning to complement GCSE studies (in 2008/09 these included Geography, Humanities, Science, Food Technology and reached approximately 190 young people from local target schools); hosting the Aimhigher Roadshow; and in summer 2008/09, delivery of the College's first Aimhigher "Uni Taster" summer school, where 20 young people from target schools throughout the Southwest attended a 4-day residential to experience university life and learning about higher education. This residential allowed participants to discover learning across all programmes and diverse units, from Property, Media and PR, Agriculture and Food, Business and Marketing, Design and Creativity (in the Business context), and Rural Skills.

For the first year, the College also now has full Aimhigher activities allocation, in line with the other five HEI partners in the Southwest.

### **Tasters and residential schools**

The College continues to run our very successful 'Land Based Careers', a two day taster course on all degree and foundation degree programmes offered at the College, in the Easter Vacation. This is open to anyone over the age of 16.

Following a very successful first year, the Aimhigher "Uni Taster" (as detailed above) will continue to run for its second year with an increased number of participants (up to 30 participants intended). The College will continue to add value for participants and the Aimhigher partnership, by offering above the minimum 3-day / 2-night requirement, at 4-days / 4-nights (Monday afternoon to Friday morning, inclusive).

Continuing to work with Wilfred Emmanuel Jones (The Black Farmer), and with sponsorship from the Fred and Marjorie Sainsbury Charitable Trust, the Land Settlement Association, and the Country Land-Owners Association, the College again provided a successful residential opportunity for 11 disadvantaged urban students in Summer 2007 (for two-weeks), 2008 (for three-weeks) and 2009 (for two weeks). The successful applicants were selected from all over the UK, to discover and enjoy the experiences and career opportunities that a rural environment has to offer. Over the past three

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years, this initiative has attracted participants from London, Essex, South Yorkshire, Reading, Warrington, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Gloucestershire and Dorset. Through continued monitoring and development, this programme will be evaluated again for 2010 and developed with the intention of better targeting participants in-line with the College's overall widening participation targets.

Through the widening participation agenda, the College is intending to expand and run additional summer schools, with a specific intention to raise the profile and increase participation in the target subject areas of Business and Property. The College has also developed relationship with the North Wiltshire Federation, with particular interest in providing opportunities for its Able, Gifted and Talented young people, who do not currently have much chance to access and learn about possibilities in higher education. The intention is to develop a residential programme (approximately 3 days) for this group, to pilot in 2010.

Similarly, networking with the 14-19 Diploma Partnership Leaders / Co-ordinators for Bath and North-East Somerset and for the Forest of Dean (a target area) has resulted in discussion around 2-day residential tasters for the Land-Based Diploma launches. Currently, this is an on-going development with the intention of developing pilot tasters and possible delivery of units for the Land-Based Diploma (through a residential programme) with regards to large-scale agriculture, mechanisation, animal husbandry and crop production for the Bath and North-East Somerset partnership area.

### **Support and Scholarships**

We are offering more support for students attending from disadvantaged areas in the form of travel expenses, scholarships and opportunities for more short term visits to the College. Over the past year, additional scholarships specifically to support disadvantaged young people have been sourced through the Fred and Marjorie Sainsbury Charitable Trust (who in 2008/09 sponsored a young person from the 2008 Young City Farmers programme onto the Foundation Degree in Agriculture), for 2009 the Emmott Foundation and the Country Land Owners Association Educational Trust are also providing substantial support for 4 students per year, additional hardship support has been provided by the widow of FE (Jim) Turner.

We are also actively addressing on-campus cultural issues arising from Widening Access. Utilising our Diversity and Equalities Committee, Student Liaison and Widening Participation Officers, Disability and Learning Support team, in addition to the new Student Advice and Support project team "S.A.S." (formerly CATalyst), we are working towards a holistic welfare and support system across the College. Over the past year, the S.A.S. team has created sub-strand groups in each of the key welfare and outreach areas of Widening Participation, Student Support, Disabilities and "Admissions to Graduation". Strand groups consequently enjoy robust reporting mechanisms (through the central S.A.S. hub) directly to the Senior Management Group (SMG).

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Increased weight and embedding of the Widening Participation agenda (highlighted by the College's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment), and also wider student support and welfare concerns has subsequently been evidenced and felt across all Schools and key Departments.

### **Main Activities**

As stated in the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment, the five areas that we are concentrating on are:

#### **1. Raising aspirations**

Working with young people, teachers and parents to give them the opportunity to understand how a degree can enhance their life, and that careers in the land based sector are not just about farming.

Expanding residential and one/half-day activities by providing financial support for attendees from target areas, and running additional one day courses for specific schools and colleges to promote opportunities available including specific programmes in Business and Property which may appeal to our non-traditional students.

Development of local area networks in schools and colleges to increase opportunity of access to the College through tailored activities that respond to school / college need and support school / college initiatives to make students feel valued, enthused and able to succeed in higher education.

#### **2. Ensuring support during study**

Whilst it is important that all students are supported through their studies it will be particularly important to provide additional support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in the development of necessary skills to make the appropriate transition from school, to Further and Higher Education. We are providing study skills support and remedial teaching where necessary. This has required an expansion of the existing provision, which is already used for many first year students to improve retention and completion rates in year one. As such, students are offered additional teaching sessions to enhance study skills, particularly at pressure points such as examinations. Study skills sessions range from presentation skills, writing for various purposes (e.g. report /essay /exam) and organisation skills, to time management, Harvard referencing, mathematics and exam preparation.

We continue to increase welfare support to back up the academic support mechanism, where every first year student is assigned a personal tutor for Personal Development and Planning (PDP) and support. We are continuing to develop the student support and welfare network and this, together with benchmarks for recruitment and retention, will be monitored and adjusted as necessary throughout the duration of this plan.

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Improving student retention will be targeted towards Year One as this is when the majority of withdrawals occur. Areas where efforts have been successfully directed are induction, academic support and welfare advice provision. At present we have a high retention rate, which we are working very hard to maintain.

### **3. Increasing collaboration with FE and schools in target areas**

We have strong links with local schools and colleges and are expanding and developing our network by offering targeted activities on campus. Through such activities, students become familiar with the College and realise what HE, and the RAC in particular, can offer for the improvement of future potential and career development.

Our range of programmes for such students has developed dramatically as we continue to monitor, evaluate and progress our provision. An integral part of this is liaison with schools and colleges to stimulate ideas that are directly relevant to school / college Curricula and which help to demystify the College and land-based careers as agriculture / farming only. Programmes concentrate on three key areas, increasing confidence and self-esteem through raising awareness, aspirations and achievement.

We shall aim to encourage students from these areas to regard the College as a possible next step following their school career through identifying subjects and careers paths that are exciting and new. Furthering this ethos, we are also dedicated to disseminating information about the opportunities in Higher Education in general, drawing upon different examples of institutions to give students the most relevant information. This is particularly exemplified in our work with Aimhigher, where the promotion of Higher Education across the Southwest is the key instruction.

This is supported by an increasing number of staff and students from the RAC visiting schools and colleges to give advice on HE, and inviting these institutions to specifically targeted events at the RAC i.e. one day or half-day activities for pupils which will develop links between the RAC and FE Colleges. Contact with these parties is maintained by specific promotional material and maintenance of email links with heads of careers and subject specialists. We also intend to pilot a 'land-based careers road-show', which will be taken into schools to showcase what the land-based industries have to offer in terms of education and career progression.

### **4. Providing targeted promotional materials**

We have increased our range of promotional materials to allow us to better approach and appeal to prospective students in areas of social deprivation and we will continue to work to ensure that our promotional material is appropriate. We shall continue to enhance our range of information services, both paper and web based, to ensure that they demonstrate that we welcome

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non-standard entrants. We will provide and publicise bursaries for these students to encourage them to feel that the College is affordable for them.

We have in the past year developed a full Outreach section to the website, which is linked from the home page and which details the support and opportunities available under the College's Widening Participation agenda. We continue to develop and re-vamp these pages for the coming year, adding new material as we develop and progress our offer.

### 5. Outreach activities

The Widening Participation Officer will continue to undertake and co-ordinate outreach activities in addition to integrating with the activities of the Centre for Rural Skills and now the Food Centre. We utilised £50,000 in 2007 rising to £75,000 in 2008, 2009 and 2010 to offer the opportunity for skill based training courses to all students to enhance their employability upon completion of their studies.

#### Bursaries

The RAC is participating in the Higher Education Bursary Scheme and all variable fee bursaries are provided through this method.

The bursaries will continue to be carefully targeted and the RAC will be flexible during recruitment to ensure that monies available are assisting and encouraging as many students as possible to study with us. Once they have joined the RAC we shall ensure they are able to continue their studies with the necessary levels of support. This may be greater than that needed for current students, so a proportion of the increased tuition fees has been, and will continue to be, invested in student support and welfare to ensure high retention rates. This may include additional support for living expenses, which are comparatively high in rural areas such as Gloucestershire, as well as vouchers to assist students with their studies and travel. We are initially concentrating on local recruitment however, and a high proportion of these students are opting to live at home whilst studying and may need financial assistance for travel to the campus.

One of the key areas that has emerged since the introduction of variable fees is the importance of promotion and simplification of the Bursary support scheme. We are working to ensure that clear, accessible information is available to students, parents and schools, as many still seem unaware of the support and help that we can offer.

From 2008 the College has concentrated major awards on the lower income brackets to ensure that needy students receive the support they require. We will also allocate more variable fee income to provide assistance to all students regardless of income. This will be provided in the form of vouchers which can only be used to support their ability to study whilst at the RAC.

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Bursary levels of up to £2,155 per student are available. All new entrants with an income level of £25,000 or less are entitled to a bursary of £1,655 with an additional £500 available to students in receipt of full support who fulfil a minimum of three of the following criteria:

1. First generation Higher Education
2. Disadvantaged Postcode (Urban or Rural)
3. Specified School or College
4. Member of a Minority Ethnic Group

All eligible students will be entitled to a voucher to the value of £100 to use for books and learning support materials, computer equipment/accessories or bicycle/accessories.

The College already allocates up to £125,000 in the form of scholarships and bursaries each year, and this will continue to be reviewed against the cost of living index.

We publish information on the full cost of total tuition fees for the courses and full support arrangements, in addition to all other charges, on our web site and in paper format. These charges will be enclosed with the prospectuses clearly stating whether they are provisional and may be subject to a cost of living increase. All College documentation is available in a variety of formats upon request from the Registry, i.e. large print, coloured background or Braille for those with special requirements. All applicants will be sent information on fees and charges with their offer letter. These will be sent out again for confirmation in March before the start of the academic year in October. This will detail how much they will be required to pay, when and where to apply for support and full details of our scholarships, bursaries and hardship support.

### **Milestones**

We have set realistic, attainable but challenging targets and would be prepared to raise these if recruitment proves more successful than expected.

We are aiming to recruit an additional 45 students from the targeted groups (local, young, urban, low income, minority ethnic) by October 2010, with 15 additional students in 2009. At present we have 40% of students receiving some level of support and 25% of students on full support, but still with little representation from our target groups. Our strategic aim is to increase the number of students in receipt of full support to 35% of the undergraduate student body.

### **Monitoring**

All applications and acceptances are closely monitored and statistics measured against targets annually. Feedback is requested from applicants who withdraw. This data already provides all the information required to monitor results and (if necessary) to revise our action plan. The Academic

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Quality and Standards Committee monitors student performance annually and further data will be kept to ensure that they are able to monitor and analyse success rates of the widening participation students. The Diversity and Equalities Committee, Diversity Officers and Registry already have an extensive monitoring system in place and this will be used to provide the necessary data for monitoring support against achievement and retention. The Widening Participation Officer will be a member of the Registry team reporting directly to the Registrar – Admissions and Records and will be responsible for collating and providing any additional statistics required. The Registrar – Admissions and Records will be responsible for identifying any trends, shortfalls or likely inability to meet targets which may require revision of the action plan. These recommendations will be included with the monthly statistical analysis of applications that is provided to the Senior Management Group, Academic Board and Strategic Planning Group.

### Key risks and dependencies

#### Key Risks

As a specialist college we may find that there is limited interest in our Courses and be unable to hit targets.

We will need to continually reassess and possibly re-target throughout the five-year period.

#### Dependencies

Input from Academic Staff and Marketing Department will be key to success.

#### Targets

October 2009 15 additional students from low participation areas

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Once the outcome of the Widening Participation Strategic Assessments have been released the RAC will review and evaluate success of variable fee bursaries and agree new targets and milestones for 2011 – 2015.

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Undergraduate students who were new entrants in 2006 - 2007 or 2007 - 2008

	Bursary Available
Students in receipt of 100% Support	1655
Students in receipt of 95% Support	1495
Students in receipt of 90% Support	1450
Students in receipt of 85% Support	1370
Students in receipt of 80% Support	1290
Students in receipt of 75% Support	1210
Students in receipt of 70% Support	1125
Students in receipt of 65% Support	1025
Students in receipt of 60% Support	975
Students in receipt of 55% Support	885
Students in receipt of 50% Support	805
Students in receipt of 45% Support	720
Students in receipt of 40% Support	645
Students in receipt of 35% Support	565
Students in receipt of 30% Support	480
Students in receipt of 25% Support	400
Students in receipt of 20% Support	320
Students in receipt of 15% Support	240
Students in receipt of 10% Support	163
Students in receipt of 5% Support	79

### New Entrants 2010 - 2011

Up to £25,000 income level	£1,655
Up to £30,000 income level	£1,050
Up to £34,450 income level	£525
Up to £40,000 income level	£260
Up to £50,000 income level	£105

### New Entrants 2008 - 2009, 2009 - 2010

Up to £25,000 income level	£1,655
Up to £30,000 income level	£1,050
Up to £34,450 income level	£525
Up to £40,000 income level	£260
Up to £50,000 income level	£105
Up to £60,000 income level	£50

Students receiving full support are also entitled to an additional £500 if they fulfil a minimum of three of the following criteria:

1. First generation Higher Education
2. Disadvantaged Postcode (Urban or Rural)
3. Specified School or College
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All eligible students will receive a £100 voucher for Bicycle and accessories/Books and learning support materials/Computer equipment