



AECC
University College

Access Agreement 2018/19

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This document was updated in August 2017 to reflect the change in name to AECC University College.

Executive Summary

The AECC University College is a specialist HEI internationally recognised for providing undergraduate and postgraduate education and training in the niche area of musculoskeletal health, based in the cosmopolitan town of Bournemouth. The University College will admit the first cohort of students on our degree awarding title in September 2017, and the AECC University College's strategic plan is to diversify the course offering into other areas related to health.

Over some fifty years, the AECC University College has built a reputation locally, nationally and internationally for the excellence and quality of teaching in its specialist areas, most notably chiropractic. There is also strong provision of postgraduate education and training in musculoskeletal diagnostic ultrasound. All the University College's courses focus on developing students' clinical and professional skills leading to highly employable graduates. Our study body comprises 75% Home/EU and 25% non-EU. We have 74 full time staff and 61 part time staff with 0.75 FTE working in the area of student recruitment and outreach.

Currently, all undergraduate provision is chiropractic and therefore this Access Agreement is written in this context. As with many vocational degrees, for example medicine, widening access to chiropractic is particularly challenging given:

- the high academic standards required to gain entry
- the academic rigour of the course and extensive academic and practical skills needed to successfully complete the course
- the extended length of the course, and
- that chiropractic is a relatively small profession in the UK (just over 3000 registered practitioners) with almost all chiropractors working in private practice. As such, chiropractic remains relatively unknown to a high proportion of the population, in particular to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Given this context, our data shows that the AECC University College performs, as expected, below benchmarks for many key HESA WP indicators, including young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods, low socio-economic groups and young entrants from state schools, see appendix 1. These are the issues we are seeking to address in our FAA.

The University College has an excellent record of retention above sector norms (~ 5% total attrition rate) see appendix 1. As a small institution, there is a collegiate culture and a strong supportive interface between tutors, professional support staff and students. Our aim is therefore to continue this good work, and ensure that as we diversify the range of student support services, aligned to the Equality Act 2010, this benefits all students.

The professional orientation of the University College's courses ensures high rates of employability. Almost all chiropractic graduates enter private practice, normally as an 'associate' under the mentorship of an experienced chiropractor. Data from the DHLE survey demonstrate high employability rates with 98% of chiropractic graduates in 2014 in work or further study six months later.

In summary, the measures set out in this Access Agreement are designed to raise the aspirations, success and progression of students from disadvantaged groups. We are also examining how our outreach helps to raise attainment and we will be refining our offering in this area within our available resources.

Our aim is to widen access to these groups at the same time as supporting the retention, attainment and progression into employment or further study of all our students. We have evaluated our current metrics and set realistic strategies and targets for future access, success and progression activities, including a financial support package to place greater emphasis on helping students from low income backgrounds throughout their studies at AECC University College.

1. Introduction

This Access Agreement is for UK and non-UK EU students commencing in 2018 on full time undergraduate courses that are subject to regulated undergraduate fees. We expect to enrol c. 111 students in 2018/19 (assuming static course portfolio).

The Board of Governors have approved 2018/19 undergraduate fees at £9,250 subject to no change in the regulatory framework governing fees. Fees remain the same for students throughout their course.

2. Access

The University College recognises the challenges in widening participation due to the nature of chiropractic as a predominantly private practice healthcare profession, and our immediate catchment area (south of England) that comprises regions in which the proportion of under-represented groups is lower than the national average. Consequently, the University College must prioritise resources on widening participation through expansion of its current outreach work both locally and as part of wider collaborative networks.

The data show that the AECC University College performs, as expected, below benchmarks on young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods and low socio-economic groups (see appendix 1). Similarly, young entrants from state schools are below national benchmarks. In contrast, AECC University College exceeds UK national averages on mature (+21 years) student entrants.

The key issues in regards to access and how we expect to address these are:

- the high academic standards required to gain entry
 - We undertake to investigate the use of contextual data in admissions and if this is appropriate for the University College
 - We undertake to investigate if the interview process adversely affects students from LPN or low income backgrounds, and if so, implement measures to overcome this negative impact
 - We undertake to continually review our entry requirements to ensure they are fair, equitable and sufficient to admit those with the potential to succeed
 - We undertake, through our outreach programme, to trial activities focussed on raising attainment, and to use effective monitoring to ensure success in this area
 - We undertake to investigate ways to develop our relationship with schools and colleges to raise attainment
- the extended length of the course
 - We will support 5 students from low incomes with a bursary for up to 5 years of study
 - We will monitor and evaluate the financial support package to ensure it is delivering the support we intend using the tools developed by OFFA's research team
- that chiropractic is a relatively small profession in the UK (just over 3000 registered practitioners) with almost all chiropractors working in private practice. As such, chiropractic remains relatively unknown to a high proportion of the population, in particular to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds
 - We will use our outreach programme to raise awareness of chiropractic and other health professions
 - We will investigate how our extensive alumni network may support this work

We are aware that co-ordinated outreach activities may be more effective and sustainable in the longer term in widening participation compared to direct financial support. Accordingly, we will implement a number of new initiatives in outreach activity, and target resources on increasing the number of entrants from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. Meanwhile, we will continue with current outreach activity including, for example, discounted fees for treatment in the University College's outpatient training clinic for low income and disadvantaged groups.

The challenges we face in widening participation are similar to those of, for example, medical schools where narrow social groups still dominate the student population. Work that medical schools are doing with primary and secondary schools provides a helpful exemplar although this must be proportionate to the size and financial means of AECC University College. Nevertheless, targeting young people who live in areas of low progression to higher education or who come from families that have low incomes or lack higher education experience is a common goal, as well as the type of activities that might be undertaken to engage and attract these groups to think about and aspire to a career in healthcare.

We therefore intend to implement a targeted and sustained programme of outreach work to raise the aspirations and attainment of younger age groups, as well as among students at Key Stage 5. We will work with local state schools and more broadly through collaboration with the Southern Universities Network (SUN). To specifically address raising attainment and the challenge faced to widen participation in the context of high entry requirements, our plans are to investigate opportunities to work with link state schools/colleges to raise attainment in science, specifically biology and other health sciences courses, either directly or collaboratively with other organisations already operating in this area.

We will engage with local state schools by establishing a number of link schools and colleges, and wherever possible those with a high proportion of under-represented groups as indicated by POLAR 3 data. In addition to investigating how to raise attainment in these link schools, we will offer activities targeted to Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils including on-campus activities to include fun practical demonstrations, hands-on activities, opportunity to learn about health, basic first aid and active lifestyle advice. This includes the programme 'Fit Friends' an after school fitness club for primary and secondary school children run by students. The programme has been established over the past two years during 'British Science and Engineering week' and will be extended outside this specific timeframe. It has the additional benefit of introducing school children to a HE campus.

For older students at Key Stages 4 and 5, we will focus on those schools with high proportions of students from widening participation backgrounds providing school visits and on-campus activities, but in this case directed to information, advice and guidance on higher education in broad terms and specifically on chiropractic as a subject to study. Our established outreach programme includes taster days and shadowing of current students both in the University College and in the AECC University College outpatient training clinic, and the support to prepare and advise students during the application period.

In many ways, engaging with mature learners is even more of a challenge in that this is a group often hard to reach. Our Access to HE course does provide mature learners with an on-campus experience which leads to enrolments. We will target this group through invitations to our targeted Back Pain talks and inviting participants to experience student life by shadowing current students in the University College and in the outpatient training clinic.

3. Success

The University College recognises that widening participation in itself does not guarantee that students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups succeed on their course and progress into employment or further education. Initiatives in outreach and widening participation must be matched by support measures to ensure that each and every student achieves their academic potential and, in this particular case, the target they have set themselves in becoming a chiropractor.

The University College has an excellent record of retention significantly above sector norms, in particular for those on the undergraduate chiropractic course (~ 5% total attrition rate). As a small institution, there is a collegiate culture and a strong supportive interface between tutors and administrative staff, and students. AECC University College will continue to provide a range of student support services aligned to the Equality Act 2010, which is of benefit not only to students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups, but to all students.

The key issues in regards to success and how we expect to address them are:

- the academic rigour of the course and extensive academic and practical skills needed to successfully complete the course
 - At the start of the course, new entrants participate in an Induction Event to familiarise themselves with the University College and with the course. Students are introduced to tutors and to their personal tutors, and each student is paired with a Year 2 student under the 'buddy system'. There is a robust academic structure consisting of the Course Leader, year tutors and unit tutors, which underpins a framework of strong academic support for each student. Student progress meetings are held regularly, and any student identified as making less than satisfactory progress is given individual feedback in face to face meetings with tutors, and in some cases a structured individualised remedial plan to follow. The University College's attrition rate is, in the main, made up of students failing to achieve the required academic standards rather than deciding that a career in chiropractic is not for them after all. It follows therefore that the low attrition rate reflects, at least in part, the robust academic support structures in place for all students. We will maintain these support systems as part of our work on student retention.
 - Student support services also include counselling, additional learning needs support, chaplaincy and language support. Up to this point, students are able to access these from Bournemouth University under the franchise arrangements between the University and the University College. Following successful applications for TDAP and institutional designation, and relevant to this Access Agreement, support services aimed at retention of students will be provided wholly by AECC University College in 2018/19 for students registered with the AECC University College.

In addition:

- We undertake to interrogate our data to ensure that no particular group is less successful than others, and if we discover this to be an issue, develop a plan to counteract. Data are monitored annually through Academic Board, and any issues will be addressed (none so far, noting the small number of some minority or WP groups within the student body).

4. Progression

The professional orientation of the University College's courses ensures high rates of employability. Almost all chiropractic graduates enter private practice, normally as an 'associate' under the mentorship of an experienced chiropractor. Data from the DLHE survey demonstrate high employability rates with 98% of chiropractic graduates in 2014 in work or studying six months later. Of course, with our strategic plans to diversify into other areas of health sciences, we must be prepared for the support required by non-chiropractic students in the future, using our own examples of best practice.

To help graduates find a suitable practice, the University College arranges meetings between chiropractors and students in their final year. As a small profession, an active AECC University College alumni and the University College being one of only three chiropractic institutions in the UK, the network between chiropractors and chiropractic teaching faculty is pivotal and effective in introducing senior students to employment opportunities. As with student support, facilitation of students into employment is relevant to all students and not only those from under-represented and disadvantaged groups, and is included in our expenditure on student success.

We also offer a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Development (Chiropractic) to all new graduates in their first year out in practice. This is designed to ease the transition from final year student practice in the sheltered and supervised AECC University College training clinic to autonomous practice as a qualified chiropractor in the 'real world'. In addition, AECC University College provides a number of part-time, blended learning MSc courses for chiropractors in specialised areas such as rehabilitation and diagnostic ultrasound, which provide graduates with the opportunity to progress to further education. These courses are strongly focussed on learning in the work-based setting. As such, the AECC University College fully recognises the importance of relevant opportunities for further study for all chiropractic graduates, in particular where this can be undertaken alongside their day to day employment.

In addition:

- We undertake to interrogate our data to ensure that no one particular group is less successful than others in progressing into work or further study, and if we discover this to be an issue, develop a plan to counteract.

5. Financial support

The University College is committed to supporting students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups through our Financial Support package. Our view is that financial support should be in place throughout the period of study all bursaries will be awarded on a year by year basis throughout the student's course. As outlined in section 2 above, the extended length of the course may be a deterrent to some groups, therefore this ongoing financial support is essential.

As such, the AECC University College will offer 5 students a bursary. Students with a household income \leq £16,000 will receive a bursary of £2,000 for each year of study. Students with a household income between £16,001 and £25,000 will receive a bursary of £1,800 for each year of study. This applies to UK students studying full-time on our undergraduate chiropractic course and will be given as a cash bursary.

We will monitor and evaluate the financial support package from the outset using the tools developed OFFA's research team.

6. How much are we committing to support this work?

In 2018/19 the University College is committing 31.9% of additional fee income to support access, success, progression and financial support as follows:

2018/19	Fee Income above the basic fee	Access and outreach	Financial support	Student success	Progression
Proposed spend	£623,170	£73,455	£60,000	£72,209	£3,989

7. Engagement with students

Our students are active partners in University College developments. They are represented on all of the University College's academic committees including Academic Board. A student representative is also a full member of the AECC University College Board of Governors. All student fees, and any annual increases in line with government policy, are approved by the Board of Governors. The University College has an established Student Union, and a full-time manager employed by the University College. Student Union Officers act on behalf of student body, and student representatives act in the student interests. Our students are strong supporters of the University College and act as excellent ambassadors in promoting the chiropractic course in outreach activities and in the wider community.

Our Access Agreement was considered by Academic Board in March 2017. In drawing up the financial support package, students were consulted and have been instrumental in shaping the financial support provided by the University College. As an integral part of access and student retention and progress, it is critical that students play a meaningful role in the University College's widening participation agenda and as a result consider themselves equal stakeholders in its success.

In addition, the Student Union executive (elected students) were asked for feedback during the drafting of this agreement and were supportive of its aims.

8. Equality Act

The AECC University College is strongly committed to the Equality Act (2010), and executes its responsibilities aligned to its Equality, Diversity and Dignity Policy across all its work with staff, students and the wider community. The University College's Policy covers all the characteristics protected by law ensuring that there is no discrimination against a particular characteristic or group in any of its dealings with all stakeholders.

The Executive Director of Administration is responsible for ensuring that the AECC University College Equality, Diversity and Dignity Policy is upheld at all times. As a member of the executive and senior management groups, the Executive Director of Administration ensures that the University College's Access Agreement conforms to the University College's responsibilities under the Act. Given the close links between access agreements and equality and diversity work, the fact that both areas are monitored through the same management systems ensures that the principles and practice of equality, diversity and dignity are firmly entrenched in, and integral to the University College's Access Agreement.

As will be evident in this Access Agreement, the University College is committed to work on widening participation, which is likely to disproportionately impact on groups with protected

characteristics. The nature of chiropractic means that we have very few students with severe physical disabilities and from some ethnic groups, but outside of this we can, and will act to access prospective students from all backgrounds.

9. Provision of Information to Students

The University College provides clear and accessible information to prospective students (and parents) at regular open days, student recruitment events, website and admissions services. Our Access Agreement will be published in full on our website. The University College interacts with different audiences in a range of ways including prospectuses, website, social media and presentations. We also provide timely information to UCAS and SLC. The Key Information Set (KIS) on the chiropractic course is published on our website.

Specific information, advice and guidance for prospective students will include:

- Provision of financial information including fees, planning advice on how to finance their period of study, extra costs, for example purchase of diagnostic kits, and bursaries and other forms of financial assistance for eligible students in each year of their study.
- The admissions process ('how to apply') and entry requirements.
- Course information, academic support services, and Student Union facilities.
- KIS and current student feedback data (NSS).

As well as published information, the University College offers advice and guidance on a one to one basis with prospective students, including financial and academic information. Moreover, the Student Union is always willing to put a prospective student in contact with a current student for advice and guidance.

All public information for prospective students is regularly monitored and there are clear lines of responsibility for approving the accuracy of the information, and for making it available in the public domain.

10. Evaluation Strategy

The University College has committed to implement an outcomes framework to routinely collect relevant data and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of our activities. In line with our targets, our focus will be on evaluating progress on the proportions of students from state schools, lower socio-economic groups and low participation neighbourhoods as well as mature entrants. Student success will be evaluated by student retention and progress into employment.

AECC University College has a bespoke student record system and will use this to mine student information and provide evidence on the retention, attainment and progression of students from all backgrounds. To do this in a systematic fashion, the University College will identify the information required in terms of independent (causal) and dependent (outcome) variables, and adopt a counterfactual approach in comparing different groups of students. As part of this work, we will look at additional fields that we may wish to add to our application and enrolment processes. We expect to monitor outcomes in terms of degree attainment and progression to employment for different groups of students while adjusting for variables such as gender and entry qualifications. This will not only enable us to understand 'what works' in terms of access and student success, but perhaps more importantly how we can improve our performance in the future in terms of our own provision and student population as we diversify.

We understand that systematic evaluation is a priority area, and that evidence of this type may be used in future quality assessment and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). While

cognisant that our data may be problematic because of small sample sizes, we will produce an annual report for internal monitoring based on the evidence that emerges from this data evaluation exercise.

11. Implementation

This Access Agreement, and evidence of how it is working in practice, will be monitored from a resource perspective by the University College's Senior Management Group with the Academic Registrar having lead responsibility.

Outreach activities will be reported to the Senior Management Group by the Head of Marketing; though it must be noted that the cost of subscribing to the Higher Education Access Tracker is prohibitive at this time, and may limit our ability to monitor outcomes for outreach activities. Registry staff will monitor student population statistics against HESA benchmarks. Annual monitoring reports on widening access will also be made available to the Student Staff Liaison Sub-Committee and through this, to the University College's Academic Board chaired by the Principal and to the Board of Governors. The University College's Bursary Policy is approved by Academic Board. Payments from bursaries are reported to the University College's governors through the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Appendix 1 – Review of AECC University College performance across the student lifecycle

Academic Year of Entry	HESA Performance Indicators				
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Access- Young full-time UG Entrants from State Schools and Colleges (HESA Table 1a)					
AECC (%)	85.7	90.0	84.6	75.0	84.7
Benchmark (%)	92.5	93.1	93.6	94.0	94.0
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	90.8	91.4	91.8	92.2	92.4
UK (%)	88.9	89.3	89.7	89.8	89.9
Access- Young full-time UG Entrants from Low participation Neighbourhoods (POLAR 3 data) (HESA Table 1a)					
AECC (%)	23.8	0.0	6.5	6.5	7.8
Benchmark (%)	11.0	12.0	12.1	12.8	12.9
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	10.0	10.9	10.8	11.5	11.8
UK (%)	10.2	10.9	10.9	11.4	11.3
Access- Young full-time UG Entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 (HESA Table 1a)					
AECC (%)	27.8	22.6	20.0	20.8	N/A
Benchmark (%)	33.7	36.4	36.8	37.7	N/A
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	31.2	33.6	33.9	34.5	N/A
UK (%)	30.7	32.3	32.6	33.0	N/A
Access- Mature full-time first degree entrants from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (POLAR 3 data) (HESA Table 2a)					
AECC (%)	0.0	10.0	9.1	0.0	7.7
Benchmark (%)	9.6	11.7	10.9	12.3	14.3
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	10.2	13.0	11.1	13.3	15.0
UK (%)	10.9	11.6	11.9	12.8	12.3
Retention- Continuation* following year of entry-all full time first degree entrants (HESA Table 3a)					
AECC (%)	93.3	90.6	92.9	91.1	91.0
Benchmark (%)	-	-	-	-	-
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	-	-	-	-	-
UK (%)	91.4	90.9	90.6	90.3	DNA
Retention- Continuation* following year of entry-young entrants (HESA Table 3a)					
AECC (%)	90.5	93.8	90.3	93.5	92.8
Benchmark (%)	-	-	-	-	-
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	-	-	-	-	-
UK (%)	92.3	92.1	91.7	91.4	DNA
Retention- Continuation* following year of entry-Mature entrants (HESA Table 3a)					
AECC (%)	100.0	85.7	100	85.7	85.7
Benchmark (%)	-	-	-	-	-
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)	-	-	-	-	-
UK (%)	88.0	86.3	86.4	86.5	DNA
†Data in italics represents local data modelled on HESA's Performance Indicators					
*Data on transfers to other HEIs is not available, so the proportion of continuing students (at same HEP) has been considered instead of non-continuation rate.					
Academic Year of Graduation	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	
Employment data (DLHE)					
AECC (%)	DNA	96.3	93.0	98.1	
Benchmark (%)	DNA	92.0	93.1	93.8	
Location Adjusted Benchmark (%)					
UK (%)	DNA	92.1	93.2	93.9	