

Access Agreement

Institution: Petroc

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Introduction

Petroc is a large, successful further education (FE) and higher education (HE) college that was formed following the merger of North Devon College and East Devon College in August 2008. The main communities served by Petroc are North, Mid and East Devon, Torridge and North Cornwall. As the only provider of both further and higher education within a 40 mile radius, Petroc offers a broad and diverse curriculum to suit the requirements of our local communities. The Ofsted full inspection report for March 2012, graded the college as “good with several outstanding features”. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) conducted a Higher Education Review of HE provision at Petroc during November 2014 and the report published in 2015 judged Petroc as meeting all UK expectations.

Presently Petroc has approximately 10,000 students enrolled on programmes that range from level 1 to level 7, of whom over 600 are HE students. The vast majority of HE students are taught at the Barnstaple sites, with the Brannams Campus housing a bespoke University Centre. The College’s core purpose as stated in our Mission statement is “leading our Community in Learning, Enterprise and Skills; Equipping it for the Future, Economically, Socially and Culturally.”

To achieve our Mission, the college published in 2015 a “Strategic Plan 2015 - 2020”, which includes Aims and Objectives designed to deliver Outcomes which will meet the identified skills needs of businesses, communities and individuals across our area to achieve sustainable economic growth, create high quality

jobs, and improve quality of life. A key objective is to stimulate and meet the demand for Higher Apprenticeships, Degree and Post Graduate level qualifications in order to achieve the outcomes of having increased the number of people studying University courses at Petroc by 22% by 2020; and having increased the number of young people gaining a place at University by 8% and at a Russell Group University by 10%.

The Petroc strategy in relation to Higher Education is based on the desire to build upon the present productive relationship with Plymouth University, our degree awarding body, through whom we deliver all our HE provision. Recruitment, selection, admission procedures and our approach to teaching HE programmes are informed by our strategic relationship with the University. The academic cooperation agreement between the parties states that we will “facilitate access to higher education from under-represented groups providing for the needs of local enterprise and contributing to both economic regeneration and social inclusion across the region”.

This aligns with the organizational Values identified in our overarching “Strategic Plan 2015-2020”, which states we will be forward thinking; inclusive; and friendly; and is indicative of the whole institution approach we take to widening participation. We are highly proactive in developing and undertaking initiatives to engage and support young people and adults facing a variety of barriers to learning, and work closely with a range of stakeholders and partners to address the specific needs of local individuals, communities and businesses through curriculum development and targeted project activity.

As an institution with a commitment to widening participation and a relatively modest entry profile, Petroc has to take deliberate steps to ensure our students are both ready for graduate employment and progression to final year honours.

The purpose of our Access agreement is to widen participation amongst under-represented groups from within our community and to support students on programme to maximise their potential and successfully complete their studies.

Under the 2014-2020 European structural investment programme, Devon qualifies for transition status, due to our GDP per capita being less than 90% of the European Union average, but more than 80%.

The area served by Petroc, however, is considerably less prosperous than areas in the South of the County. This is reflected in the numbers of students enrolling onto higher education programmes. The HE data map shows that the proportion of 19 year olds progressing to higher education across the South-West to be at 32%. The overwhelming number of wards which Petroc serves in our immediate vicinity, however, are well below this figure, with wards such as Bideford South, Bideford East, Forches and Whiddon Valley, Ilfracombe Central, and Yeo Valley having participation rates of less than 20%.

Since the introduction of increased tuition fees in 2013 /2014 full time enrolments onto higher education programmes at Petroc have remained relatively consistent, indeed there has been a small increase amongst those aged 18 -25. However we have seen a significant decrease amongst mature

students, particularly those applying for part-time programmes. Since 2013 enrolments onto part-time programmes have declined by approximately 30%.

In addition to the relative lack of economic prosperity, approximately 13% of our enrolled students receive either Disabled Student allowance or additional support based upon reasonable adjustment.

Our rural location, the relative lack of economic prosperity, coupled with the excellent support we offer disadvantaged learner's means that we recruit a very high proportion of our higher education students from our local communities. In 2016/2017, over 97% of our Higher Education students reside within 30 miles of their main campus, and 85% reside within 20 miles of their main campus. This, itself, however, provides challenges in that our communities are poorly served by public transport meaning many learners need to consider the relative cost of transport when deciding to study at Petroc.

This Access Agreement sets out how Petroc aims to sustain and improve access, student success and progression amongst all of our students and in particular those from 'under-represented groups'. Our main focus for this agreement is to increase enrolments, improve retention, achievement, success and progression from a broad range of under-represented groups

Fees, student numbers and fee income

New entrants commencing a full time Higher Education programme from September 2018 will be subject to fees of £7,100 per year. The College currently has 520 directly funded students.

The fee levels for 2018/19 are set out in the table below:

For Home and EU students	2018/19 Tuition Fees		
	Continuers from 2016/17 starts	Continuers from 2017/18 starts	New entrants
Full time – all courses B.A / FdA / FdSc / PGCE/ HNC	£6,750	£6,900	£7,100
Part time Charged on a pro-rata basis based on the full time fee. The maximum in any one year will depend on the total number of credits studied but would not exceed £3,835			

Permitted real terms fee rises. The College will increase the fee levels in the table above in line with permitted real terms fee rises as determined by the Government. Our part-time fees will be pro-rata based upon the number of modules studied

Estimated Student numbers.

For Home and EU students	2018/19	
	Continuers	New Entrants
Full time – all courses	238	236
Part-time	58	68

Access, Student Success and Progression Measures

As stated previously the College has a long term commitment to widening participation. To support this Petroc has maintained a modest entry tariff of 56 UCAS points on all our programmes. In addition, the HE Admissions Policy states that we welcome applications from students with a non-traditional background, some of whom may not yet have achieved a level 3 qualification. Applicants are able to access higher education based upon qualifications, life /work experience and the presentation of some form of portfolio. This is a rigorous process and all applicants are asked to attend interview where their suitability to study at an HE level may be judged and indeed they may reflect upon their own motivations and commitments. Furthermore, we undertake targeted activities to improve attainment at GCSE and A Level to improve access to HE for young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

This approach, with a clear focus on widening participation, we believe can be successful for student and institution alike with delivery based upon excellent individual learner support from application to graduation and programmes taught to small classes. Our average higher education group class is 10. We view the time spent with learners prior to the commencement of their studies to the formal progression links to both employment and Plymouth University (in excess of 60% of our students progress directly from an FdA or FdSc programme to a one year BA / BSc top up at Plymouth) as being crucial to student success. All Higher Education learners are supported by a personal tutor system which provides both academic progress support and pastoral care. We also have trained staff to manage the disability assist scheme. Student success is monitored at both programme and institutional level to ensure these strategies are proving effective and delivering benefits for learners.

Petroc is a proactive partner in the 'Next Steps South West' National Collaborative Outreach Programme project, led by Plymouth University, through which we are significantly enhancing our outreach activities through an agreed programme of activities and targeted projects. Our OFFA Access Agreement and Nest Steps South West activities are mutually supportive, through a harmonised approach to avoid duplication.

Petroc is also a key delivery partner in two European Social Fund applications being led by Plymouth University to support further activity to widen participation. Again, our project activity has been designed to be mutually supportive of and enhance our Access Agreement activity.

It is anticipated that the current extensive range of outreach activities will continue to promote access, although the College reserves the right to amend

this depending upon any changes in widening participation funding. For the year 2018/19, we plan to invest £147k in access measures, of which £56k will be OFFA countable funding. Current activities include:

- Events and promotional materials, including case studies, intended for mature learners and for non-traditional entrants to Higher Education
- A range of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) workshops and events aimed at raising attainment at GCSE and A Level and encouraging progression to higher level study in STEM subjects
- Aspiration-raising activities targeted at pupils aged 14 years and above including roadshows, visits from our HE Admissions team and master classes
- Afterschool 'Ambition Academy' sessions for 14-16 year olds in a range of subject areas to improve attainment at GCSE
- 'Academic Academy' activity for 16-18 year olds in a variety of subject areas to improve attainment at A Level
- Summer school programmes aimed at under-represented groups to provide HE experiences, improve attainment, build confidence and develop HE-relevant skills
- Open days and Open evenings held at the College
- Support with the UCAS application process
- Existing learners and recent graduates supported to be Ambassadors for HE at events and open days
- Engagement with Plymouth University Student Union to raise local aspirations
- Participation by College staff at open days held at local, regional and national venues
- Mailshots including promotional materials aimed at encouraging our own Level 3 students to progress onto our higher education provision
- Visits to local and regional schools, including secondary and colleges
- An annual high-profile Graduation Ceremony held in the centre of Barnstaple to raise awareness and aspirations
- Vocationally-targeted employer engagement events
- A National Citizens Service scheme aimed at raising aspirations in 16-18 year olds. These activities are aimed predominately at pupils and students studying within local schools across Devon and in particular across North Devon
- A range of aspiration-raising activities, including Erasmus+ work experience in other EU countries, for Petroc Level 2 & 3 learners to encourage progression to HE
- Information on financial support available to students

In 2018/19, the institution will direct £232k of its additional fee revenue (of which £88k will be OFFA countable funding) to support success measures in the following ways:

- Additional learning support for students with additional challenges
- Additional study skills workshops
- Drop-in support sessions
- An enriched tutorial system adding to the student experience and supporting employability opportunities

- Additional personal finance workshops to ensure students are able to manage their finances effectively
- Curriculum development to ensure it meets local needs
- Outreach activities as outlined above
- Institutional milestones linked to success, achievement and retention
- An emergency hardship fund to support students with crisis-point challenges

In order to promote progression, in 2018/19, £42k (£16k OFFA countable) will be invested in the following activities:

- Clear information, advice and guidance to ensure learners enrol on appropriate provision and consider progression routes from the beginning
- Employer fora and curriculum development to ensure provision meets local employer needs
- Visits to Plymouth University Campus to promote progression to BA/BSc 'top-up'
- Engagement of recent graduates as ambassadors and to provide case studies
- Employability support through workshops, employer engagement and targeted careers advice
- Work experience and internships as an integral element of provision to support employability

In 2018/19, £62k will be made available to support eligible students through bursaries and hardship funds.

£28,102 will be available as discretionary financial assistance for students registered on higher education provision with Petroc who are in significant hardship either because of the extra costs of participation or due to unexpected events. In order to be eligible to apply, students must be 'home' students for fee purposes.

An Access Bursary Fund of £34,346 will be available to students starting a Degree programme with Petroc in 2018/19 having progressed from an Access to Higher Education programme in Devon. To be eligible, students must:

- Be permanently residing in Devon;
- Have studied an Access to HE programme (completion 2016, 2017 or 2018);
- Enrolled by September 2018 at Petroc;
- Not be in receipt of any other scholarship or bursary for the academic year 2018/19;
- Have residual household income of up to £25,000

Students must also fulfil additional widening participation criteria.

Of our total expenditure on access measures only the proportion relating to underrepresented groups will be reflected in our access agreement:

	2018/19	2019/20
Outreach	£56,044	£62,303
Student Success	£88,069	£97,905
Progression	£16,012	£17,800
Financial Support	£62,448	£69,422
Total Spend	£222,573	£247,430

Targets and Milestones

The institution has established the following milestones and objectives in relation to its higher education provision falling under this access agreement:

- Retention targets: to reduce our non-continuation rate and bring it in line with the benchmark of 12.5% (from 17.6%); Progression targets: increase internal progression from Petroc level 3 programmes to our Higher Education programmes by 5% from 70% in 2011/12 to over 75% in 2018/19
- Improve the annual internal progression rate from foundation degree completers onto the new BA honours degree programmes at Petroc to 20% 2018/19.
- Widening participation: maintain high level of student engagement from local area (in 2015 circa 97% of our students came from the local area), with a particular focus on areas in POLAR quintiles 1, 2 and 3
- Curriculum development: to respond to the identified needs of local employers and students by developing new programmes and offering curriculum flexibility and particularly the development of level 6 programmes that allow students the opportunity to complete a full degree locally

Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

The institution will undertake annual monitoring and impact evaluation of this access agreement to confirm compliance and progress towards the achievement of the milestones it has established. Responsibility for the monitoring report will rest with the co-ordinator for Higher Education, who will consult with the HE Student Forum in assessing progress. The report will be presented to the HE Student Forum and College Senior Management Team for approval, and following such approval be sent to the College Governors.

The annual monitoring report will be submitted to the Director of OFFA following its approval by the College Governors. The report will be presented to the Senior Management Team at such time as to ensure that OFFA will receive the report by its deadline. The report will incorporate the following sections:

Financial data summarising recruitment levels, payment of bursaries, and other financial support made available to students.

Outreach activities that have been undertaken during the year and progress made in meeting institutional targets and milestones.

Student success and progression support activities that have been undertaken during the year and progress towards meeting institutional targets and milestones.

Evaluation information regarding the impact of financial support made available to students, including qualitative and quantitative data.

Postcode and characteristic analysis of students benefiting from support measures and statistical analysis of outcomes.

Collated data from student feedback questionnaires specifically relating to access, success and progression measures.

Planned changes to our approach, where relevant, based on the findings of our evaluation activities.

Equality and Diversity

We are always conscious that we wish to provide opportunities for all students no matter what their background or experience. We actively promote Equality and Diversity as a College and in 2014 achieved accreditation and gained the Equality Standard.

Petroc has a high percentage of students from under-represented backgrounds. The College is focusing on providing additional support in a number of different ways to help these students. We have a Student Support Officer for HE based in our Additional Learning Support Office. We have dedicated HE staff based in our Learning Resource Centre. We generally encourage small group teaching to support those less able students and where progression arrangements to a top-up allow, we embed a variety of coursework across a programme to ensure students gain a range of academic graduate skills. The College has a traffic light system in place to identify 'at risk' courses and by association 'at risk' students. The College is currently working with students to identify areas where additional support can best be placed to support better retention and greater success.

Provision of information to prospective students

We are committed to the provision of accurate and accessible information to prospective students. Our website was completely redeveloped during 2014 with a new and expanded Higher Education section created. The website provides information for both existing and potential students and contains full information on fees, bursaries and programme expectations. The results of all HE student surveys are also publically accessible through the website.

We hold a number of HE Open days and evenings throughout the year for all prospective students to come and see the College and meet the staff.

We are committed to providing timely and accurate information to UCAS and the Student Loans Company (SLC) as appropriate.

Financial information will be made available to all prospective students considering courses coming under this Agreement and made available via the Higher Education website. Such information will be guided by the principles of accessibility, transparency and clarity.

Information will summarise the annual and aggregate fee for the chosen course, hardship arrangements, and other sources of financial support available to students. It will also identify the sources from which students can obtain advice regarding the general financial framework applying to students undertaking full time higher education studies, so that they can establish the likely level of debt they will incur by the end of their studies. The institution will provide a full range of financial advice to prospective and current students through the production of fact sheets outlining fee charges and the hardship funds available to students with worked examples, through individual interviews and in response to queries received in person, by telephone or by email. Student Services will also provide briefing sessions as part of Open Day events and will be available to give individual advice and guidance.

During induction all students will receive a presentation from the Student Services team which will, inter alia, cover issues associated with student finance, student support, careers advice and learning support available. It is the intention of the College that all information relating to costs and means of support for students will be available in the Prospectus and on the college website and accessible via social media.

This information is explained verbally during the interview process, supported by the written leaflet, to ensure that applicants are fully informed before they make a decision on whether to accept a place with us.

Consulting with students

All our Higher Education students participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) and Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ). In addition students are represented on all programme committee meetings. The results of these various forms of student feedback are then agenda items for the Senior Management Team (SMT). In addition, the College holds an HE Student Forum once a term, the results of which are reported back to senior management for discussion and action.

In terms of consulting with students about fees, the College carried out a number of focus groups of students on programme. Students were asked why they choose to study Higher Education at Petroc. The majority choose the North Devon location due to local employment and domestic circumstances, followed by course content and the clear progression routes to Plymouth University.