

EXPECT TO ACHIEVE

Newman University

Access Agreement 2015/16



Access Agreement 2015/16

1. Introduction

Newman University is proud of its successes in providing access to university education to students from a comprehensive range of backgrounds. It consistently exceeds sector averages and location adjusted benchmarks for recruiting students from under-represented groups including mature students, the proportion of students from low participation areas and students from families with no previous H.E. experience. It is a fundamental part of Newman’s Catholic mission and ethos to offer a high quality, supportive yet challenging formative education to all sections of society and it is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive community. Due consideration is given with regard to the protected characteristics at all stages from pre-application to completion.

This agreement has been developed in consultation with members of academic and support staff and with the Students’ Union and covers all courses offered by Newman University including initial teacher education and part-time courses.

We are striving to improve retention and success for all students and feel that the measures we undertake will particularly benefit students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds.

2. Recruitment of nationally under-represented groups

Young full time entrants	From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 and 7			From low participation neighbourhood (Polar2)		
	Actual %	LAB* %	Sector %	Actual %	LAB* %	Sector %
2012/13	52.1	44.2	40.8	23.3	18.6	15.7
2011/12	44.6	39.5	30.7	19.8	15.8	10.6
2010/11	48.8	41.4	30.6	24.5	15.9	10.5
2009/10	46.6	40.4	30.6	20.0	16.8	10.3
2008/09	47.6	42.2	-	23.9	16.5	10.1

LAB* location adjusted benchmark

Source <http://www.hesa.ac.uk>

Newman recognises that the definition and categorisation of widening participation is, in itself, complex. The institution considers how data on social class, gender, ethnicity or disability is gathered and analysed enabling it to consider the relationship between recruitment, retention and success with a view to improving the outcomes for all students. As the table above shows, we consistently perform far better in both the sector average and location adjusted benchmarks for the

recruitment of students from NS-SEC 4, 5, 6 & 7 and from low participation neighbourhoods.

3. Fees

Newman will charge up to and including £9,000 for its full time and up to and including £6,000 for its regulated part time programmes covered by this access agreement. Postgraduate courses for the initial training of teachers will be charged at up to £9,000. Fees below £9,000 will not remain fixed and we expect them to rise each year in line with inflation. Full-time Foundation Degrees will be charged at up to £9,000.

4. Access and Student Success Measures

As part of its Mission of Service, Newman continues to invest significantly in its widening participation activities. As Newman has approximately half of students classified as WP, we have included proportional costs for key members of staff involved in retention and student support on a pro-rata basis. Newman intends to spend £639,000 on additional countable access measures in 2015/16, some 11% of additional income, based on an undergraduate tuition fee of £9,000.

Support for widening participation students is embedded within processes and systems at the University. We undertake measures to improve the attainment rates and outcomes for all our students. Recent statistics show that WP students at Newman are as likely to be retained and to succeed as non-WP students. As detailed elsewhere in this Agreement, we work with students from the very start of their time at Newman, with pre-entry transition programmes, through their time as a student using appropriate academic and non-academic processes, including extra-curricular activities, and ending with a supportive careers and alumni service.

Information, advice and guidance to students across years 10-13 continue to receive significant investment through targeting our outreach work by working in close partnership with selected schools and colleges, and using non-traditional routes. For example, through our education liaison team, we have arranged to work with youth clubs in the region to engage with young people outside a formal learning environment. Specific efforts continue to be made into considering new ways of reaching parents and debt averse groups, and also under-represented groups such as white working class boys and specific faith groups.

We agreed to host the Children's University Graduation Ceremonies for Birmingham school pupils and their parents/teachers from 2014-15 onward. This provides an opportunity to make contact with primary age children and normalise the concept of university to non-typical potential applicants at an early stage. We are founder members of Citizens UK Birmingham and this provides an opportunity to further develop relationships with schools, local community groups and specific faith groups.

Our outreach work also includes a range of diverse activities, including raising awareness of university education amongst younger pupils and interactive sessions to facilitate students' exploration of post 16 and 18 options including university. We provide IAG to students and their parents on the student finance regime, particularly focusing on the repayment structure and the fact that no fees have to be paid up front. Support is also be provided for students researching university options, including sources of information, writing effective personal statements and interview technique. In addition, targeted outreach activities focus on links with further education colleges and schools, both locally and nationally, whose students have a particular need for support and IAG.

Taster sessions remain an important part of our outreach work, enabling disadvantaged students to visit the University, meet staff and students and understand the differences between school/sixth form and university level learning. This demonstrates the diversity of students attending university, the levels of independence expected of students and dispel some myths which prevent application to higher education.

Care leavers receive targeted support from pre-application and whilst on course. Newman University is proud to have achieved the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Award for demonstrating a commitment to supporting young people in and leaving care. Care Leavers have the opportunity to attend pre-induction events to assist with the smooth transition into university life, such as meeting key Newman staff and familiarising themselves with the campus. Care leavers have priority acceptance on Newman's pre-entry course for undergraduates. Care Leavers also have guaranteed access to year round accommodation as well as specialist student support to enable them to reach their academic potential.

As a strategic priority, Newman's flexible portfolio has been expanded significantly and this will continue. This provides flexible options which have several benefits for WP students, including lower than pro rata fees requiring them to borrow less from the Student Loans Company, and enabling students to have more time than full-time students for other commitments such as paid employment, volunteering or family commitments. The flexible route can also assist retention by allowing more students to transfer from full-time to flexible studies if they find full-time study incompatible with family and/or work commitments.

We have, and are further developing, links with a network of schools and FE partners. Newman shares best practice in relation to outreach and other matters with other HEIs including through formal links including HELOA.

Contextual admissions were introduced in 2012, using additional data supplied by UCAS. This enables us to more effectively identify applicants with the ability to be successful at university but who have not yet been able to demonstrate their potential due to a lack of previous academic opportunities. All courses implement contextual admissions, including the most selective oversubscribed degrees.

5. Improvements in retention

Non-continuation following year of entry

Year of entry	FT young first degree entrants		Mature first degree entrants		Total	
	Actual %	LAB* %	Actual %	LAB* %	Actual %	LAB* %
2011/12	7.6	7.6	6.6	10.0	7.2	7.4
2010/11	10.1	9.0	10.4	12.4	10.2	9.9
2009/10	11.8	9.0	11.4	12.4	11.7	9.9
2008/09	9.3	8.4	16.2	11.7	11.0	9.2
2007/08	12.2	9.0	12.3	13.5	12.2	10.2
2006/07	11.6	9.2	8.9	12.7	10.8	10.2

Source <http://www.hesa.ac.uk>

The proposals outlined below identify how Newman continues to invest its resources in activities designed to enable distinct groups of students with very different needs to successfully complete their studies. Latest figures suggest that the measures undertaken have had a positive effect on retention.

Following the development of the institutional Strategic Plan 2014-20, the Learning and Teaching Strategy will be reviewed, and a retention and success strategy will be developed. It is anticipated that this will improve the outcomes of widening participation students. This will be reported at, and monitored by, the Learning and Teaching Committee and Equality & Diversity Committee as appropriate. The findings of on-going evaluation will be disseminated to staff and students and used to inform refinements to the retention strategy.

Confirmed applicants onto a single or combined honours degree are invited to take part in Newman's pre-entry transition programme. This promotes academic and social integration through delivery of a 14 day pre-entry blended learning course and subsequent transition activities throughout level 4. The programme also includes access to on-line resources which students can access before they start university to enhance their study skills prior to enrolment. Additionally a one day student seminar, 'HEADsup' is offered for students moving from level 4 into level 5. This support helps students to integrate academically and socially into university throughout their first year of study, but particularly in their first semester, which research shows is critical to completion.

Newman continues to additionally invest in employing Senior Academic Support Tutors (SASTs). The role of SASTs is to provide 1-1 support and early advice and guidance (or act as signposts) on a wide range of issues, academic and non-academic, which could adversely impact on academic performance and progression. This system has been piloted and early intervention and support has proven to be effective in supporting students.

We have further expanded our programme of writing mentors and study skills tutors with their services being offered for 6-8 weeks each year. The mentoring programmes allow second and third year students to support first year students in their academic writing, appropriate referencing and essay construction. This less formal support complements the University's Senior Academic Support Tutor system. Evaluation of the programme indicates that this programme builds the confidence of first year students, particularly those from vocational routes. The peer mentoring element of the programme enables first year students to raise issues they would not feel comfortable raising with a member of staff, and are often reassured by the experiences of second and third year students. Students also have the opportunity to receive support from IT mentors.

Academic Professional Tutors (APTs) provide support to ITT students, both through pre-arranged appointments and also through regular open-access sessions where students are invited to meet with an APT to discuss any problems associated with their learning.

Study Skills tutors are recruited to work specifically with students with disabilities which impact on their learning, for example, mental health problems, dyspraxia, or visual impairments. The Study Skills tutors develop and agree strategies to help students overcome their difficulties and provide individualised support for students with additional learning needs. This is followed by the development of an individual learning plan, and regular review meetings to monitor progress and enable students to develop their independent learning skills.

A Student Charter has been developed in consultation with the Students' Union, to clarify the expectations students have regarding the support and involvement from Newman staff. It also sets out the obligations students have in relation to attendance and engagement which will enable them to benefit from the opportunities and support provided to become effective independent learners. The Charter has been in place since September 2012 and is evaluated and updated periodically.

We recognise that non-academic factors can also contribute to non-completion of degree courses and, as a fundamental part of Newman's ethos is developing the whole person, we invest resources in providing an enhanced welfare provision. This investment develops additional partnerships with outside agencies, and facilitates greater pastoral care. Furthermore a welfare advisor is employed specifically to support students who face multiple barriers to staying on course and completing, and a Mental Health advisor supports students with mental health issues.

6. Student Success

Student success is indicated through a number of stages and we seek to ensure that all our students are given the best opportunity to succeed throughout their time at Newman.

In addition to the retention strategies previously outlined, a framework for transition has been put in place, not only for those joining university, but for those moving from level 4 to level 5. Academic regulations are constantly under review to ensure they support retention and success whilst upholding standards. It is anticipated that the portfolio review currently being implemented, with its greater focus on a coherent programme, will improve cohort identity and in turn, assist with retention. The move to 20 credit modules will reduce the number of submissions being made and will provide more timely feedback in formative assessments. Staff undertaking HEA research projects, including the What works? Student Retention and Success Change Programme, examine induction and transition strategies and thus provide opportunities to review current practice.

Module Leaders have written new 20 credit modules as part of the overall process of re-designing our undergraduate curriculum. An integral part of their work has been to ensure that the design of each module integrates the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities appropriate for each level of study and develops students as active learners. These modules and the overall 20 credit programme will be evaluated in 2014-15 and 2015-16. It is anticipated that a key outcome of both the 20 credit programme and the Portfolio Review will be improved retention.

Newman University already issues a HEAR to all graduating students across all programmes and is currently developing an interim HEAR to be used at the end of each level of study as a basis for reviewing academic progress and planning future activities, whether individually or with support from a tutor and in supporting student engagement in opportunities beyond the curriculum, and the recording of appropriate achievements in relation to these as well as an *aide memoire* for students in making applications which may be needed before the final award is made, e.g. for sandwich placements and internships; permanent employment; further study or training opportunities. A voluntary accredited awards scheme which enhances employability is in place.

7. Developing Employable Graduates

All full-time and flexible degree programmes at Newman have a work placement module and an important focus for the curriculum is developing and embedding transferable skills useful for further study or employment after graduation. This is particularly important for widening participation students as it gives them direct experience of graduate level work, which can then lead to enhanced mobility through enabling opportunities to network, an increased awareness of career and

work opportunities and allows for reflection of aspirations as well as an awareness of legal rights and responsibilities at work. Students are encouraged to initiate and manage their own placements, increasing their research skills and strategies as well as gaining knowledge of employment markets.

Newman University Volunteering Programme supports students to successfully manage volunteering independently; to develop their knowledge, skills and experiences which will contribute to their future employability and success upon graduation.

We are accredited to Matrix, the Quality Kitemark for Careers Information Advice and Guidance, and are members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services.

8. Newman Scholarships

Newman has a number of scholarship schemes, awarded on the basis of academic achievement, ranging from £2,000 to £10,000. Payments will be made over 3 years, providing students meet certain conditions, and we expect over 50% of these scholarships to be awarded to applicants from WP backgrounds. In 2014/15, in order to be eligible for a Newman scholarship single and joint honours students must:

1. Achieve **either** a minimum of BBB or ABC from three full A-levels (A2) awarded in one year
2. Be studying on a full-time, three year undergraduate course that charges the full tuition fee and must have selected Newman as your conditional firm or unconditional firm choice.
3. Be classed as a Home student by the Student Loans Company

Additional criteria may apply to Initial Teacher Education students.

Eligibility criteria and awards details for 2015/16 entry will be provided via the University website.

9. Targets and milestones

One of the university's key targets relates to year-on-year stabilisation or improvement in retention on all courses. As outlined earlier, Newman is implementing robust plans to improve retention rates, based on demonstrable successes within the institution and in other parts of the sector.

9.1 Targets for recruitment of nationally under-represented groups

Newman remains committed to supporting access to higher education for all students with the academic ability to benefit from university level study and, as mentioned earlier, has increased the provision of flexible routes specifically for these students. Our targets will continue to be above national and location adjusted benchmarks.

Young full-time entrants	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 and 7	44%	45%	46%	46%
From low participation neighbourhoods	19%	20%	20%	20%

Newman will undertake over 100 activities per year in relation to outreach, including taster sessions, higher education events in schools, colleges and non-traditional settings, AIG and events aimed at raising aspirations and encouraging applications from under-represented groups.

9.2 Targets for non-continuation following year of entry

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
FT young first degree entrants	9.5%	9.0%	8.5%	8.5%	8.5%
Mature first degree entrants	11%	11%	11%	11%	11%

The retention strategy will provide an overarching view of the many threads associated with retention improvement.

10. Monitoring & Evaluation

Newman continues to review its plans for monitoring and evaluation of the Access Agreement in 2014-15 and ensure that plans for 2015-16 are documented and based on a partnership between Senior Management, its two Schools, central support services and the Students' Union within the framework of an institutional plan.

We have improved the data available across protected characteristics so that we have a clear picture of how all students progress. Within the management structure retention targets are monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee, whilst performance in relation to recruitment and retention of under-represented groups is evaluated by the Equality and Diversity Committee. Monitoring of the Access

Agreement is reported to the Learning and Teaching Committee and other committees as appropriate.

Further consideration is also being given to modifications to the Annual Level Five Student Survey in 2015-16. Specific questions in relation to academic support, student services and student financial support will enable us to systematically review and understand current policies and practices. The findings will then inform strategic planning and targeting appropriate support based on the identified needs of our diverse cohorts of students.

In addition to quantitative data, we utilise more in-depth qualitative methods of data gathering particularly in relation to WP student engagement with Student Support Services.

Research is being undertaken across the institution both to evaluate and inform planning. A review of the effectiveness of Senior Academic Support Tutors has been undertaken which demonstrated that the SAST system adds value within the University. We are participating in the HEA Student Retention and Success Change Programme and our vision is 'to deliver institutionally coherent and participatory educational practices that promote successful progression through strategies which enable our heterogeneous student body to succeed'. Additionally, we are undertaking research into Leading the Student Experience, funded by Newman, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and the HEA. There are a number of other small scale research projects across the institution which will inform good practice and contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the Access Agreement. Newman is for example in the process of reviewing the impact of its financial support to students in consultation with staff and students with a view to informing its on-going institutional policy in this area. Academic staff have contributed to sector knowledge by presenting papers around Widening Participation and the student experience at conferences and seminars.

A cross-institutional group meets on a regular basis throughout the year to monitor and evaluate the measures set out in our Access Agreements. This group includes student representation in the form of a member of the Students' Union Executive, academic and support staff representation and has Senior Management Team involvement.

11. Equality & Diversity

Newman University has developed an Equality Scheme for 2011-2015 in recognition of the interrelated nature of equalities legislation and in response to the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011. We have already made significant progress in driving forward the equality agenda through its disability, gender and race equality schemes, action plan, guidelines relating to the other equality protected characteristics, equality impact assessments processes and diversity planning. Newman's equality policies are framed within Catholic social teaching and

have been approved through consultative committees and Senate together with approval, as appropriate, by the University Council.

We ensure that Equality Impact Assessments are part of any programme validation or re-approval process so that consideration is given to the needs of all students. Staff are encouraged to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy which gives them an opportunity to map their teaching practice against the UK Professional Standards Framework and to undertake CPD modules to develop the inclusive curriculum.

The Equality Scheme states the University's on-going commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity and sets out the actions that will be taken across functions and activities to promote equality and raise awareness. The Equality Scheme is monitored and reviewed by the Equality & Diversity Committee, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

12. Provision of information to prospective students

Information is made available on the Newman, UCAS and SLC websites, and Newman's Facebook page includes finance information and a Q&A section relating to fees and support. A financial information booklet is produced and sent to all enquirers and to local secondary schools and this will give full information regarding fees, SLC and scholarships.

Interactive sessions are also provided to facilitate students' exploration of post-16 and 18 options including university. We provide IAG to students and their parents on the student finance regime, particularly focusing on the repayment structure and the fact that no fees have to be paid up front. Support is also be provided for students researching university options, including sources of information, writing effective personal statements and interview technique.

13. Consulting with students

A Student Charter drawn up by the Students' Union sets out expectations relating to both the University and individual students; it is reviewed regularly to ensure that students and staff are happy that expectations are being met.

With regard to the Access Agreement, a member of the Students' Union Executive is a member of the working groups for both drawing up and monitoring the Agreement.

The Students' Union is represented on all University committees, including the Learning & Teaching Committee and the Equality & Diversity Committee and through active involvement in committees make a contribution to widening participation issues.

The University and Students' Union actively pursue student consultation through a range of methods including social media and the Course Representative system which result in a greater involvement and feedback across a range of subject and support areas. Discussions increasingly focus on the accessibility of the curriculum and teaching and learning spaces.

The 'Students as Partners' project provides an opportunity to address a range of issues on a range of student-led projects.

14. Summary

The main concerns of the Access Agreement, i.e. widening participation and student retention and success, are of strategic importance to Newman University. As a Catholic institution, we have full regard for Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* ('from the heart of the Church') 1990 and we are particularly passionate about the constitution's mission of service: "34 ... (the university) will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it."

This mission is at the heart of what we are and what we do and we will continue to strive to improve outcomes for widening participation students from pre-application stage through to degree completion and employment. It is our aim to provide a formative student experience which instils a sense of vocation and increases motivation thus impacting positively on retention and success.