

Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) 2013-14

1. Summary

1.1 This Agreement is submitted in accordance with the requirements placed on those higher education institutions that intend to charge above the basic rate¹ of tuition fee for Home/EU students commencing full-time undergraduate courses from 2012-13. It has been prepared in accordance with the guidance from OFFA² and after extensive consideration by a range of University and College Committees, which have included student representation³.

1.2 The key features of the Agreement are:

- The higher rate⁴ of tuition fee (according to the maximum rate announced by the Government annually) to be charged, irrespective of course, to full-time UK and EU undergraduates and Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) students admitted from October 2012 onwards;
- A flexible and needs-based financial support package that will provide a choice of either fee remission or support for maintenance for those undergraduates from lower income households;
- A minimum level of outreach activities appropriate to currently under-represented groups;
- Challenging milestones, aimed at increasing the proportion of our UK undergraduate intake from particular groups without compromising the integrity of Cambridge's admissions procedures and entry standards.

2. The Context of Undergraduate Admission to Cambridge

2.1 This Agreement is concerned with the admission by the Colleges of UK students from UK schools and colleges. The collegiate University's policy is to admit UK students of the highest academic calibre and potential irrespective of financial or other non-academic considerations. In conducting our admission process the University and its Colleges adhere to the five principles set out in the independent review of Admissions to Higher Education led by Professor Schwartz in September 2004⁵. A fair admissions system should:

- be transparent;
- enable institutions to select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and their potential;
- strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid;
- seek to minimise barriers for applicants;
- be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes.

2.2 The standard A-level offer for undergraduate entry to Cambridge is currently advertised as A*AA. There is a large pool of qualified applicants and competition is rigorous: in 2010-11, only 27% of c.9,000 applicants from UK schools and colleges could be accepted, and of those accepted over 83% exceeded the standard offer (the average number of A*s achieved by entrants was 2.5). The University does not operate subject quotas, although some courses are subject to external controls (for example medicine) or capacity restrictions (for example architecture and some laboratory-based

¹ The "basic rate" for 2013-14 has been set at £6,000 for full-time courses

² "How To Produce An Access Agreements for 2013-14", Office For Fair Access, April 2012

³ Most particularly the Undergraduate Admissions Committee and University Council, whose membership includes representatives of the Cambridge University Students Union

⁴ The "higher rate" for 2013-14 has been set at £9,000 for full-time courses

⁵ www.admissions-review.org.uk

courses) and competition is open across all subjects. Because of the full-time, residential nature of Cambridge's undergraduate courses, it is unlikely that the University's undergraduate intake will significantly increase over the next 5 years. A wider pool of qualified applicants will accordingly make admission to Cambridge all the more competitive.

- 2.3 We are also mindful of the implications of the difficulties being experienced by the state sector in student take-up and teaching provision in a number of subjects that are critical for entry into many of our courses, including modern languages, mathematics and physical science subjects. Additionally and as noted by the Russell Group, a lower proportion of state-sector students overall achieve top grades compared with those in the independent sector, and state sector students are less likely to apply to selective universities⁶.
- 2.4 We have in place rigorous selection processes (which include interviewing over 80% of UK and EU applicants and aptitude tests for particular courses). These are intended to identify, as precisely as possible, the highest achievers with the greatest potential from the pool of applicants who are capable of meeting our entry requirements and the demands of our intensive undergraduate programmes. Our ability to identify students likely to succeed is demonstrated by our high retention rates (currently 98.1%) and by the proportion (over 85%) gaining at least Upper Second Class Honours.
- 2.5 Whilst we shall continue to monitor examination performance of students from the various school backgrounds, research recently completed by the University⁷ shows that performance in public examinations continues to be the best predictor of a student's likely performance once admitted to the University, and that there is no significant differential in terms of performance between students admitted by school sector.

3. Fee Limits

- 3.1 The University's intention is to charge all UK and other EU undergraduates irrespective of course, a standard tuition fee⁸ set at the amount determined by the Secretary of State as the higher rate under Part III of the Higher Education Act 2004⁹. For those entering the University in October 2013 this will be £9,000. The rate will increase annually in accordance with rates announced by the Secretary of State. The same rate of tuition fee will apply to UK and other EU students admitted to the PGCE.
- 3.2 Those undergraduates who are spending a full academic year abroad or on an industrial placement as part of their undergraduate course from 2012-13 will be subject to a fee charged at half of the rate described above. Subject to any policy change under the terms of the scheme, students who are spending an academic year abroad as part of an ERASMUS exchange programme will not pay a fee for that year.
- 3.3 Any student deemed to be continuing studies that were commenced before October 2012 will not be charged the new rate of tuition fee.
- 3.4 On present policy it is estimated that by 2016-17 (ie the point at which it is expected that almost all of undergraduate students will have been admitted under new fee arrangements) and subject to any controls operated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), approximately 10,300 undergraduate students and 400 PGCE students admitted to the University will be paying the higher rate of tuition fee. This would produce an additional fee income above the standard rate of c£31.7 million.

4. Expenditure on Additional Access and Retention Measures

⁶ www.russellgroup.ac.uk/russell-group-latest-news/137-2011/4808-hesa-performance-indicators--russell-group-comment/

⁷ www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/research/

⁸ Also known as the "University Composition Fee"

⁹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/8/contents

- 4.1 The University has made significant progress against outreach measures over the last decade. For example the proportion of young state sector students securing a place at the University of Cambridge has increased by 6.3 percentage points to 59.3%¹⁰ and the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnicity students admitted reflects national demographics¹¹. The University is currently engaged in an unprecedented level of additional outreach activity which reaches a diverse range of under-represented groups across the UK.
- 4.2 The University has a strong commitment to widening participation. The University therefore intends to commit to expenditure on access measures at a higher level as suggested in guidance from OFFA (see 4.4 below).
- 4.3 Until 2011-12 all expenditure from additional fee income on access measures by the University of Cambridge was focussed on delivering financial support through bursary provision, at an annual cost of £5.8 million, or 29.2% of fee income above the standard rate¹². From 2012-13 a proportion of fee income will be specifically allocated additionally for the conduct of outreach activities.
- 4.4 It is estimated that under the new arrangements and by 2016-17, the total expenditure by the University of Cambridge on access measures from additional undergraduate fee income will amount to approximately £9.8 million per annum, or c32.0% of fee income above the standard rate. In line with advice provided by OFFA, we further estimate that 10% of additional PGCE fee income will also be spent on access measures.
- 4.5 Overall, the collegiate University will, even with the higher fee, still be meeting out of its own resources almost half the real annual cost of c£17,000 of educating an undergraduate at Cambridge and thereby benefitting every UK and EU student at the University, regardless of background.

5. Additional Access Measures

Outreach

- 5.1 The University of Cambridge aims to attract the best and brightest students in the UK, regardless of background, and already engages in an extensive range of outreach activities to support this objective. Outreach is delivered collectively and individually by the Cambridge Admissions Office, the Colleges, the Faculties and Departments, and the Cambridge University Students Union. Activity falls into two principal categories: engagement designed to encourage applications to Cambridge from groups presently under-represented; and general aspiration-raising activity on behalf of the sector. Much of this work is delivered in collaboration with other higher education institutions, schools and colleges, and we will continue to support this work. Examples include the national series of Student Conferences delivered in partnership with the University of Oxford, and the HE Partnerships project which engages local students with HEIs in the region and beyond.
- 5.2 The University works with a number of specific under-represented and disadvantaged groups across the UK in order to raise aspiration and to improve access to higher education. These include children in care; students eligible for free school meals; Black, Asian and minority ethnicity students; mature learners; students educated in further education colleges; and bright students in schools and colleges which have not historically sent students to the University of Cambridge.
- 5.3 Students in each of these groups (and their parents and advisers) are supported through a national programme of school visits and events which are delivered by the Cambridge Colleges using the Area Links Scheme, as well as through summer schools and taster events delivered by the Cambridge Admissions Office, the Cambridge Colleges, University Faculties and Departments and the Cambridge University Students Union. This activity (which is outlined in a Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submitted to HEFCE annually) will be continued.

¹⁰ HESA Performance Indicators 1998-99 vs 2009-10,

www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2060&Itemid=141

¹¹ www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/behindtheheadlines/ethnicrepresentation.html

¹² As reported in the 2009-10 annual monitoring statement returned to OFFA in January 2011

- 5.4 To date outreach activity has been funded from external sponsorship, philanthropic donation and from time-limited national initiatives such as Gifted and Talented Excellence Hubs and Aimhigher. The total cost of this activity is estimated at £2.7 million per year. However, from 2012 the collegiate University will allocate a proportion of additional fee income to underpin and develop outreach activity. By 2016-17 this will amount to £1.5 million per year.
- 5.5 Through this funding the collegiate University will undertake to:
- increase the number of places offered on events with demonstrable impact, particularly summer schools, teachers events and higher education ‘taster’ days;
 - preserve the legacy of Aimhigher work as it relates to Cambridge (for example through a programme of engagement with younger students in and around Cambridgeshire in partnership with schools, colleges and higher education institutions in the region);
 - deliver a sustained programme of activities and advice for younger students in local secondary schools in collaboration with other HE providers (including Anglia Ruskin University);
 - develop initiatives to engage with students in state schools across the UK to encourage them to choose appropriate subject combinations and make applications to selective higher education institutions;
 - continue to work closely with the University of Oxford on national outreach initiatives;
 - resource efforts to ensure that our PGCE intake reflects the undergraduate population from which we recruit, and to build better networks of graduate teachers to facilitate wider outreach activity. We will appoint a member of staff to take this work forward and to further develop our plans.
- 5.6 Such work will be focussed on suitably qualified students from under-represented or disadvantaged groups or from schools and colleges with low rates of progression to Cambridge and other selective higher education institutions. Events will be monitored annually in order to determine, as far as is practicable, outcomes and develop our objectives.
- 5.7 The collegiate University already uses contextual data to support its outreach activity and admissions process¹³; for example, students from low participation backgrounds or whose education has been significantly disrupted or disadvantaged through health or personal problems, disability or difficulties with schooling are invited to draw their circumstances to the attention of the Colleges through the Extenuating Circumstances Form. The University will continue to conduct research into the factors affecting admission and the role which contextual data might usefully play in selection.

Retention

- 5.8 The collegiate University provides unusually individualised and intensive support to its students. Weekly supervisions and tutorials involve very small groups and all undergraduates have a Director of Studies in their College who closely manages their academic progress as well as a personal tutor to advise and support them on pastoral issues. College based support is complemented by lectures, seminars, and practical classes, organised by Faculties and Departments which are increasingly specialised in the later years of the course. Students benefit from high-quality College accommodation which is available to all undergraduates for at least three years of each course, and also from extensive medical and counselling support. All of this contributes to an unusually low drop-out rate, but is delivered at significant cost. Retention rates will be kept under review as the University responds to the demands of an increasingly diverse student body.

¹³ For further information see www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/info/contextualdata.html

Financial Support for Students

- 5.9 The University is committed to the principle that no publicly-funded UK student should be deterred from applying to an undergraduate course at the University of Cambridge because of financial considerations, and that no such student should have to leave because of financial difficulties.
- 5.10 As part of this commitment, the University will offer students choice and flexibility in terms of financial support, thus allowing individuals to tailor support to their particular needs and circumstances.
- 5.11 The University plans to give all UK undergraduate students in receipt of a full government maintenance grant (ie from households with an income of c£25,000 or less) financial support of £3,500 per year (£5,650 for mature students¹⁴) which they can choose to use either as a maintenance bursary or to reduce their fees.¹⁵ Students in receipt of partial maintenance grants (ie from households with incomes of between c£25,000 and c£42,000) will be offered support of up to £3,500 on a tapering basis¹⁶. This support will cost approximately £7.1 million per annum by 2016-17. Students from elsewhere in the EU will be entitled to similar support subject to proper demonstration of equivalent household income.
- 5.12 In addition we shall match-fund support provided under the National Scholarship Programme to provide an additional fee waiver (which must be taken as a fee waiver) of £6,000 for students in their first year of study who are both in receipt of full government maintenance grants and also from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds (for example care leavers)¹⁷. This additional support will amount to approximately £1.2 million net of matched funding from the government by 2016-17¹⁸.
- 5.13 Where government support is provided for tuition fees as standard (for example in respect of devolved administrations in the UK), entitlement will be reduced on a pro rata basis.

Figure 1: Summary of Undergraduate Financial Measures

Household Income	Support Package	Fee Waiver	Maintenance Bursary
Below c£25,000 pa (Disadvantaged Groups)	£3,500 per year, plus an additional £6,000 in the first year only.	In the first year between £6,000 and £9,000 may be taken as a fee waiver. In subsequent years up to £3,000 may be taken as a fee waiver.	Between £500 and £3,500 may be taken as a bursary.
Below c£25,000 pa (Others)	£3,500 per year.	Up to £3,000 may be taken as a fee waiver.	Between £500 and £3,500 may be taken as a bursary.
Between c£25,000 and c£42,600	Up to £3,500 per year.	Up to £3,000 may be taken as a fee waiver.	Between £500 and £3,500 may be taken as a bursary.

- 5.14 The University intends to explore the use of the Higher Education Bursaries and Scholarships System (HEBSS) to inform the process of allocating fee waivers and maintenance bursaries.

¹⁴ Mature students for the purposes of financial support will be defined as (a) studying for a first degree, (b) 21 or over at the start of the course and (c) resident in Cambridge all year round

¹⁵ Note that we will take into account any funding secured from other public sources (for example the NHS and funding made available from UK devolved administrations) when assessing eligibility and amounts to be awarded

¹⁶ We have chosen to link our provision to government support arrangements; this will be reviewed should these arrangements change significantly

¹⁷ Such awards will be made by the University in compliance with additional eligibility criteria set by the government

¹⁸ Assuming that the National Scholarship Programme continues in the form announced, until the effect of applying intended criteria is better known it may be difficult to offer exactly the planned number of awards in any given year.

- 5.15 The financial support package described above will be reviewed following the first year of operation and may be subject to change from 2013-14 onwards to ensure that intended outcomes are achieved.
- 5.16 Almost all students admitted to the PGCE programme at Cambridge are entitled to training bursaries. The University will give all UK mature students¹⁹ in receipt of a full government maintenance grant (ie from households with an income of c£25,000 or less) financial support of £1,000 per year. Mature students in receipt of partial maintenance grants (ie from households with incomes of between c£25,000 and c£42,000) will be offered support of up to £1,000 on a tapering basis²⁰. This support will cost approximately £60,000 per annum. Students from elsewhere in the EU will be entitled to similar support subject to proper demonstration of equivalent household income.

6. Targets and Milestones

- 6.1 The University will continue to encourage applications from well-qualified applicants from groups that are currently under-represented and to admit a greater proportion of them within the framework of our admission policy and without compromising entry standards. Experience demonstrates that outreach activity (particularly that focussed on younger age groups, as advocated in OFFA guidance) will not be reflected in the composition of the student population for some years.
- 6.2 The University recognises the value of HESA performance indicators and benchmarks, but notes that the benchmarks have severe limitations in a Cambridge context in that they take insufficient account of the University's entrance requirements, both in terms of subject combinations and levels of attainment.²¹
- 6.3 Guidance from the Office for Fair Access sets out three key areas to be addressed by Access Agreements. These are outreach, admissions and retention. Accordingly the University proposes to measure its progress against four corresponding targets:
- to increase the proportion of UK resident students admitted from UK state sector schools and colleges so that they fall within a range of 61-63%;
 - to increase the proportion of UK resident students admitted from low participation neighbourhoods to approximately 4.0%;
 - to meet HESA benchmarks on retention;
 - to offer a commitment to the minimum number of places available on summer schools at the University.
- 6.4 The University has selected the four targets described above because they are measurable, do not rely on information which is unavailable (or inconsistently available) at the point of application, and are possible to influence without compromising either the principle of needs-blind admissions, or entry standards. We will nonetheless continue to consider such other data as is made available by UCAS and HESA and its usefulness in measuring our progress.

Proportion of Intake from State Schools

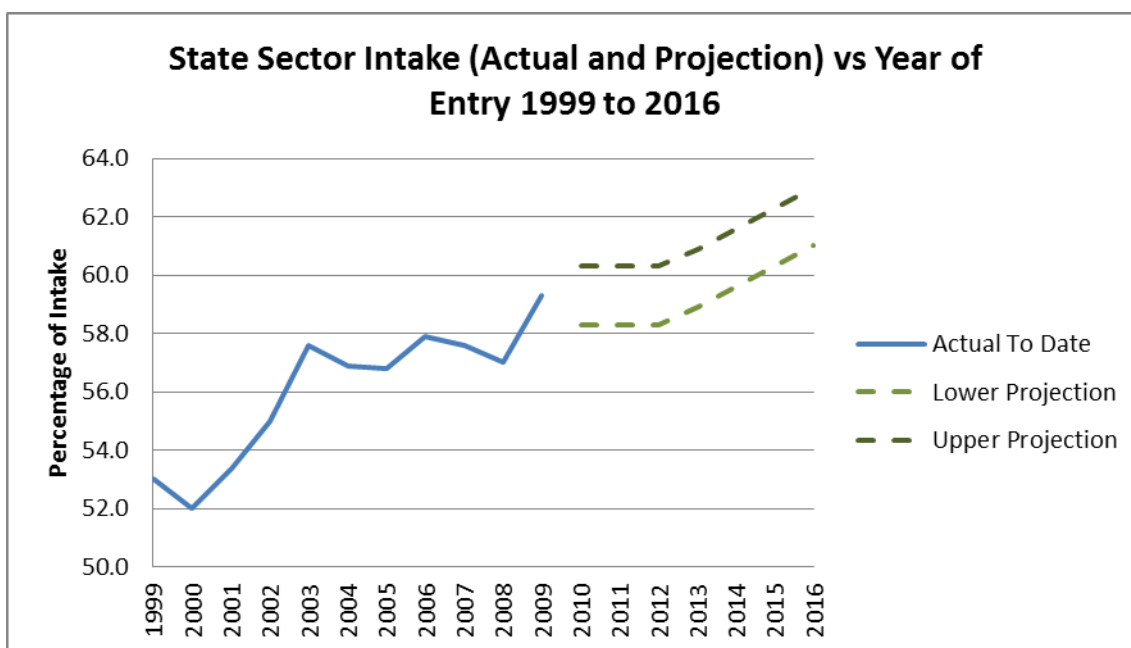
- 6.5 The University's principal objective is to increase the proportion of our UK undergraduate intake from schools in UK state sector.

¹⁹ Mature students for the purposes of financial support will be defined as (a) 24 or over at the start of the course (ie they were 21 or over when they commenced their first degree or have returned to higher education after a break)

²⁰ We have chosen to link our provision to government support arrangements; this will be reviewed should these arrangements change significantly

²¹ www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/research/

6.6 Research conducted by the University²² suggests that the proportion of students nationally educated at state schools securing examination grades in subject combinations that reflect our entrance requirements and the achievement level of students admitted to Cambridge stands at around 62%. The University's objective therefore is to increase the proportion of those students admitted from the state school sector so that they fall within a range of 61-63% by 2016-17. Given the uncertainty regarding application trends in light of the new financial arrangements our minimum objective for 2012 entry was to maintain our existing intake profile²³; thereafter however we will seek to make progress at an average rate of 0.7% pa (but taking into account the probability of year on year fluctuations). The graph below shows progress over the last 10 years and the upper and lower projections allowing for a 1.0% fluctuation either side of the planned position.



Proportion of Intake from Low Participation Neighbourhoods

6.7 Currently HESA performance indicators and other national datasets relating to socio-economic background do not take adequate account of the entry requirements of individual institutions. Whilst they take some account of attainment, they do not do so in sufficient detail for highly selective institutions such as Cambridge where the average candidate admitted has 2.5 A* grades with specific subject entry requirements. For the present we have adjusted our HESA low participation neighbourhood benchmark in line with the results of our research in relation to state school entry and will use this as our target. We consider that to maintain the pre-2012 entry level will prove to be demanding in the first year, but we aim to make annual progress thereafter (with allowance for statistical variation) to 4.0%. We will seek data through HESA or otherwise to amend or update our target in relation to socio-economic background in a revised access agreement next year.

Retention

6.8 The extensive support offered by the Cambridge collegiate system ensures that the University has one of the best rates of student retention in the sector (currently 98.1%²⁴). Nonetheless, increased levels of fee debt present significant challenges that are difficult to predict. A secondary objective will therefore be to ensure that retention rates correspond at least to the HESA benchmark for non-

²² www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/research/

²³ At the time of writing the 2012 entry admissions round has not completed

²⁴ HESA performance indicators 2009-10, www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2064&Itemid=141

continuation rates in the year following entry for full time first degree entrants. This benchmark is currently 1.9%²⁵.

Minimum Number of Places on Summer Schools

- 6.9 Research has shown that summer schools are a particularly effective and measurable mechanism for improving access to higher education. The Sutton Trust reports that around 95% of students attending its summer schools (all of whom are from state sector schools and colleges with relatively low rates of progression to selective universities) go on to attend higher education²⁶. The University's own data demonstrates proven success in relation to subsequent admission to Cambridge of summer school attendees over several admission cycles. The University will therefore increase the number of summer school places offered (currently 400) to a minimum of 600 per year for the next five years, making the Cambridge summer schools programme one of the largest and most ambitious in the UK.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

- 7.1 The University will continue its policy of making admissions statistics publicly available, through the *University of Cambridge Reporter* and its web-site. Those statistics include data on the number of applications and acceptances by school type, region, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic classification.
- 7.2 The University's adherence to this agreement and its progress in reaching the objectives indicated above will be monitored through the University's Undergraduate Admissions Committee (jointly chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Secretary to the Colleges' Senior Tutors Committee) which report to the principal University and Collegiate bodies. The Committee will take advice from the Admissions Forum, the intercollegiate body charged with managing undergraduate admissions and delivering agreed targets and objectives. The Undergraduate Admissions Committee will annually review application, offer and admission trends, particularly in respect of currently under-represented groups. It will also keep under review, and advise as necessary on the amendment of admissions and recruitment processes that have a bearing on securing a wide and diverse pool of well-qualified applicants.
- 7.3 Scrutiny of outreach activities will be undertaken by the Outreach Steering Group (reporting to the Undergraduate Admissions Committee) which will co-ordinate and prioritise those activities and review their effectiveness. The success of outreach activities (aside from those which are web-based or of a general aspiration-raising nature) will be monitored through analyses of qualitative evaluation and attendee and application data.
- 7.4 The University has identified specific groups that may be particularly affected by the new financial arrangements and so has prepared an Equality Assurance Assessment (EAA) in line with BIS guidance. The University will continue to consider any potential disproportionate or adverse impact on protected groups (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) periodically via the groups described above.
- 7.5 We will develop systems to capture outreach activity covering UK schools and colleges. This process will facilitate a co-ordinated approach to interaction with those schools and colleges and enable the effectiveness of outreach activities to be assessed through long-term data collection on each institution's higher education applications, offers and admissions within both a Cambridge and a national context.
- 7.6 Post-entry reviews will be undertaken by continued analyses of retention rates and examination performances of relevant groups in comparison with those of the overall cohorts.
- 7.7 We will continue to monitor the ease with which students make the transition from school to university on a subject-by-subject basis. The University has in recent years invested in a Transkills

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ www.suttontrust.com/research/ten-year-review-of-sutton-trust-summer-schools/

Project to assist with this transition²⁷. The personal attention paid to the needs of students through the Colleges will continue to enable prompt resolution of any individual difficulties.

8. Provision of Information to Students

- 8.1 The University will ensure that full details of its access measures including a detailed description of financial support arrangements are published in future editions of our Undergraduate Prospectus, finance guides and on the web²⁸. Advice and information will continue to be given to students during school and college visits and at Higher Education fairs, conferences and open days.
- 8.2 We shall provide in a timely manner such information as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the Student Loans Company (SLC) reasonably require to populate their applicant-facing web services.

²⁷ www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/transkills/index.html

²⁸ See www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/finance and www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/cambridgebursary

