

Access & Participation Statement

Provider : The University of Buckingham
Provider's UKPRN : 10007787
Registered address : Yeomanry House, Hunter Street, Buckingham, MK18 1EG
Contact : Mr Christopher Payne, Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer
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Introduction

The University of Buckingham is an established provider of over 40 years' standing. Founded in 1976, the University was incorporated by *Royal Charter* (RC000730) on 11 February 1983 and is authorised to award taught and research degrees in perpetuity. The University is listed on the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKPRN 10007787) and is registered with both the Office for Students as an *Approved Provider* and the Charity Commission for England and Wales as a not-for profit Charity (Charity # 1141691).

Current Performance

The founders of the University were driven by a desire to create an educational institution that was rigorously independent in its thinking. While this ethos remains, it has been complemented by an emphasis on designing and delivering academic provision in ways that are innovative, flexible, and focused on the student experience.

With approximately 3700 students, the University is among the ten smallest UK universities: nonetheless, the University prides itself on its range of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, offering courses across ten major subject areas, with rare combinations and niche specialisms within these.

The University's pioneering accelerated undergraduate degrees (excluding the MBChB) follow two broadly similar models: those which students commence in January, and which are completed in two calendar years; and those which students commence in September, and which are completed by December of the second year after entry. The academic calendar for these degrees comprises four terms of roughly equal length corresponding to the four quarters of the year, with no extended summer break for either staff or students. The University's core accelerated degrees are thus of 2 years / 8 terms or 2¼ years / 9 terms in duration, with cohorts studying together for their final 6 terms. Typically, larger numbers of UK domiciled 'home' students start in September than in January, while this ratio is reversed amongst non-UK-domiciled (*international*) students.

The University also offers a condensed 4.5-year MB ChB programme derived from a well-established curriculum. Divided into two Phases, the first consisting of integrated and interdisciplinary units taught on campus, and the second building on this learning through intensive work with patients and doctors in the clinical environment. In keeping with the Buckingham ethos, the ratio of students to clinical teachers and patients are kept low so that our students have the best chance to interact with a wide variety of patients and doctors.

The accelerated degree model has, broadly, three advantages when compared to the conventional archetypes:

- i. the continuous learning and teaching process allows for a steadier pattern of knowledge and skills acquisition – with a consequent reduction in the potential for learning loss during a lengthy summer vacation.
- ii. the similarity of the academic year to that of the world-of-work is recognised by employers as a better preparation for life after university.
- iii. the overall cost to the student, considering the effects of earlier labour-market entry, is significantly less.

The University's status as an *Approved Provider*, however, restricts the value of Student Finance England tuition-fee loans that UK-domiciled (*home*) undergraduate students can access to the so-called *lower limit* (currently £7625 per annum for full-time two-year programmes, £6355 for standard full-time programmes, and £4765 for part-time courses). Given these entitlements are somewhat less than the annual tuition fees for most programmes, there is typically a funding gap. To address this disparity, the University has partnered with the FCA-regulated company *StepEx*, to offer home students (uniquely, we believe, for UK undergraduates) *Future Earnings Agreements* to improve access still further.

By contrast, maintenance and postgraduate loans are awarded in the same way, and at the same levels, as for any other provider. The University will continue to lobby for students studying on our accelerated degrees to be eligible for the same funding entitlement as their peers studying on traditional three-year programmes.

The aforementioned organisational and funding models are key drivers of the University's unique demographic profile.

Atypically, the University's admissions records for the winter term 2024/25 reveal a 55.5% / 44.5% female-to-male split, more balanced than the sector average of 57% / 43%.

The reduced UK maintenance costs made possible for international students by accelerated degrees impacts on the 'Domicile' and on the 'Ethnicity' profiles of our undergraduates. For all OfS Providers included in the *TEF 2023* statistics, the 4-year aggregates for 'EU' and 'Other international' domiciled undergraduates were 5.8% and 11.1% respectively (16.9% non-UK in total). For Buckingham these were 4.9% and 39% (43.9% in total).

Because the count of students in the White, Other, Mixed, Black, and Asian attributes within 'Ethnicity' is restricted to students who are UK-domiciled, direct comparisons of these attributes between providers and the sector for student populations as a whole are made complex. For Buckingham, for example, 45.5% of undergraduates fall into the 'Unknown or not applicable' (because not UK-domiciled) category, as against 17.7% across the sector. However, even within the restricted sample of UK domiciled students, Buckingham's proportions of White, Black and Asian students (25.6%, 9.3% and 14.4%) are distinctly different to those within the sector (56.7%, 7.8%, 11.9%), giving substance to the University's claim to an unusually diverse student body.

The University's reputation for accelerated degrees also impacts in turn on the 'Age on entry' profile of Buckingham undergraduate students, given the possibilities it affords for students

who seek university qualifications several years after leaving secondary education. For the same 4-year aggregate, 40.1% of our undergraduates were aged 21 or over on entry, nearly double the sector average of 21.8%.

And given the above, it is unsurprising that the University's *Entry Qualifications* profile should also be different, giving rise to important considerations. At Buckingham, an unusually high number of undergraduates on full-time study routes are recorded as already having 'HE qualifications on entry': 25.7% as opposed to 8.7% in the sector as a whole. Indeed, out of 101 institutions with recorded aggregates of >1000 UG students for the period, only seven have higher proportions of entrants with HE-level qualifications on entry than Buckingham, and only three of these are universities.

Notwithstanding the above, the University recognises that, with entrants from Low Participation Neighbourhoods comprising 8.6% of the intake in 2020/21 against a location adjusted benchmark of 13.4%, there is more work to do to support applicants from these difficult-to-reach areas.

Given the extent to which, since its inception, the University has been responding in its teaching and curriculum to its diverse student body, the *TEF 2023* data does not point to significant BME attainment gaps of the kind identified by other universities. For continuation, Buckingham full-time undergraduates performed broadly in line with, or materially above, benchmark for all of the following demographic split indicators: Age / Disability / Ethnicity / Sex / ABCS and Deprivation Quintiles / Domicile. Here it may be seen, indeed, that, amongst those who are UK-domiciled, Black and Asian students perform marginally better than White. Similarly, students with declared disabilities are shown to have out-performed the average.

Post-study, the University continues to exceed its HESA benchmarks. In 2020/21, 69.5% of Buckingham's graduates had entered full-time work against a benchmark of 61%. Buckingham also bettered the HESA benchmark for post-study unemployment of 5% with only 3% of graduates in this category. Of note, disaggregating this data by age shows that Buckingham exceeded the HESA benchmark for full-time employment amongst graduates aged 30 and above.

In 2025, the *Complete University Guide* ranked the University in the top sixty nationally for Graduate Prospects (outcomes).

Access, Student Success and Progression

The University's charitable objects are '*to advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, and to enable students to obtain the advantages of University education*'. Its activities focus on '*the enhancement of education for the public benefit and the foundation, maintenance and support of an educational establishment for students, to include residential accommodation and all necessary and proper ancillary services for such establishment*.' In keeping with this, the University is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive environment within which diversity is valued, and discrimination is challenged.

The University's commitment to small-group teaching is real. Throughout the *TEF 2023* period, we continued to commit to regular weekly teaching across Levels 4 to 6 in tutorial groups of

not more than eight students. Combined with seminars, workshops, access hours, and one-to-one supervision of major projects and dissertation supervision sessions, this means between a third and a half of our students' contact time with staff is experienced in small groups, with tutorials typically run by module leaders, rather than delegated to assistants. The University's largest undergraduate programmes have annual intakes of less than 150. This means even the largest lectures are small in comparison with sector averages.

The University's culture of personal attention and responsiveness to students is also reflected in the Personal Tutor system, student support, the accessibility of academic staff at all levels and the rapid feedback on assessed work was noted as an example of good practice in the University's successful *QAA Institutional Review* in 2017 and follow-up *Annual Monitoring* exercise in 2019.

Financial Support

During 2024 the University continued to progress innovative funding arrangements targeted to help UK students bridge the gap between fees and student loan levels via Future Earnings Agreements (FEAs) underwritten by the University. Accessibility through financial support is further strengthened by scholarships and bursaries available to undergraduate and postgraduate students, awarded on the basis of academic merit, location and/or need. In making means-tested awards, we consider several factors including family income, investments and savings, assets and family circumstances.

Each year, the University offers a limited number of *The University of Buckingham Bursary* aiming to support students from low-income backgrounds. It is hoped that by reducing financial barriers, these students are able to fully immerse themselves in the rich cultural opportunities that university life provides beyond academic achievements. The bursary is worth up to £9,500 (subject to satisfactory progression) and students receive this as a termly reduction in tuition fees. To be eligible, students must be full-time, UK-domiciled undergraduates on a two-year programme in receipt of a maintenance loan of over £7500 or able to illustrate significant financial hardship. The latter condition allows the University's Scholarships and Bursaries Committee to consider factors affecting students' financial circumstances that may not be considered by the Student Loans Company when making awards.

Alternatively, some applicants are eligible to apply for a *High Achiever Scholarship*, worth a total of £2000, that is awarded automatically to *home* students, other than those registered on the MBChB, who achieve AAB or higher in their A levels; to ensure equity, a range of other equivalent qualifications are accepted on a case-by-case basis. The equivalent *International Undergraduate High Achiever Scholarship* is available to *international* students, again other than those registered on the MBChB, who can demonstrate they have equivalent qualifications.

In addition to the above, the University's School of Computing is committed to inspiring more young women to pursue careers in computing and IT and offers a £2000 bursary to female undergraduate computing students.

The University's *Postgraduate First-Class Scholarship* is awarded automatically to both *home* and *international* students registered on an eligible masters or doctoral-level programme and

who hold a UK *First-Class Honours* degree or overseas equivalent; the value of the *Postgraduate First-Class Scholarship* is set at 33% of the designated tuition fee.

An equivalent 33% *Postgraduate Discount* is available to graduates of any of Buckingham's master's degrees of *Distinction*-level standing upon progression to an eligible doctoral-level programme. Similarly, Buckingham graduates of either *2:1* or *Merit*-level standing may be eligible for a 25% *Postgraduate Discount* upon progression to further study.

In celebration of The University of Buckingham receiving its Royal Charter on 11 February 1983, the University created a new *Scholarship Scheme* (RC40A) for outstanding applicants for research degrees in any discipline from 2023-2025. From 2026, the RC40A scheme will be renamed *The University of Buckingham 50th Anniversary Research Scholarship* scheme (U50A), in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the University's incorporation in 1976 as the University College at Buckingham.

In both cases, awards will be made to candidates with excellent academic profiles and professional potential: normally, a *Distinction* at master's level and/or in the master's dissertation project/dissertation element, and a strong CV and outline proposal. Under the RC40A scheme, successful *home* applicants will have the entirety of their fees paid by the University for the duration of their studies while successful *international* applicants, meanwhile, will only be charged the difference between the UK and international fee rate, with the remainder of their fees paid by the University for the duration of their studies; all recipients of the RC40A scheme will gain professional work experience by contributing a small number of hours per week to departmental projects as a condition of tenure.

In addition to the above, externally-funded bursaries and scholarships, conditional upon satisfactory progress at each stage of study, are available to students across all disciplines. The University is grateful for the generosity of benefactors including the *Audrey Osborn Trust*, the *Brunner Family Trust*, *Christopher Ondaatje*, the *Eranda Rothschild Foundation*, the *Garfield Weston Foundation*, the *Gregory Donation*, the *Headley Trust*, the *John Desborough Memorial Bequest*, the *Lillingstone Trust*, the *Leche Trust*, *Ronald Coase*, *Ronald Swains*, the *Snowdon Trust* and Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

Of particular note in supporting the University's ambition of widening access and participation in the local area, the *Swains Scholarship* of up to £5,000 per year is awarded to residents of Buckinghamshire or Milton Keynes able to demonstrate financial need undertaking an undergraduate course in any subject.

More recently, *The Desborough Bursary* was launched to provide financial support for UK students with entrepreneurial spirit pursuing business-related studies at the University. This is a £5,000 award available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The University of Buckingham Foundation had total assets less liabilities of £4.7m at 31 December 2024 (2022: £4.5m), available, subject to the terms of the Foundation's *Trust Deed*, for the benefit of the University. As of 31 December 2024, £4.2m (2023: £4.2m) of these funds were held as endowed investments and property, generating income to support scholarships, bursaries, grants and other projects.

In 2024, the University awarded total scholarships, bursaries, and prizes of £0.9m (2023: £1.3m). These scholarships and bursaries include funded, named scholarships from the Foundation of £0.1m (2023: £0.3m). In 2025, there is a budget of £1m for scholarships and bursaries, of which circa £335K had been allocated by the end of May 2025. In view of the number of underutilised scholarships and bursaries funds the University is working to broaden the eligibility criteria for awards where possible, and redesign website pages to better signpost applicants towards awards for which they may be eligible.

Outreach Activities

The University of Buckingham recognises that whether prospective applicants are embarking on their first degree as an undergraduate student or pursuing further study as a postgraduate student, choosing where to study is an important decision. Accordingly, the University holds regular *Open Days* designed to provide detailed insights into life as a Buckingham student as well as to enable prospective applicants to explore campus facilities and accommodation and to hear from students and staff everything about living and studying at the University.

For applicants who already know what they want to study, the University's *Taster* sessions are designed to enable them to experience first-hand the high-quality teaching and interactive small-group settings on offer. The University's 45–60-minute *Campus Tours* are conducted by experienced Student Ambassadors from all of the University's subject areas. For those unable to make the trip to Buckingham, *Virtual Tours*, accessed from the website, are also available.

University staff attend UCAS and internal recruitment fairs and also visit local and national schools and colleges to raise awareness of the benefits of higher education generally and the opportunities offered by Buckingham's provision in particular, and the University also enjoys close links with local Further Education Colleges and *Access to HE* programmes for mature students.

Transition Arrangements

The University's induction programme provides new students with curated activities designed to assist their transition into the university a week before the start of teaching. There are a wide range of general orientation activities alongside targeted pastoral and academic support specifically designed to address any prior educational and social inequalities that student may have experienced. These welcome week activities are reviewed annually with feedback being used to improve the offering for the next cohort.

The University's small-group teaching model facilitates the development a close academic relationship between students and staff. The aim is for students to feel they belong to a learning community that values their views and that will help them achieve their potential.

Student Success and Progression

In keeping with its long-established ethos of personalised learning, the University is committed to providing ongoing support for all its students. In addition to the University's wellbeing, mentoring and counselling services, all students are provided with timely access to external

health-care providers including the local GP surgery, talking therapy services such as IAPT (Healthy Minds), NHS Mental Health services and substance misuse support.

Wherever possible, students with disabilities or additional needs are identified prior to registration and tailored adjustments are made for them. Available support includes one-to-one study skills and mentoring, note-taking, study support, library assistance, scribing, reading or proof-reading and personalised *Examination Access Arrangements* all of which are funded directly by the University.

Early disclosure of additional needs is encouraged, and internal assessments are arranged as soon as possible so that specific interventions can be put in place. Progress is monitored closely and includes ongoing comparison with the student's qualifications at entry as well as that of the wider cohort. Where applicable, students who declare a disability are guided through the process of applying for the *Disabled Students' Allowance*.

Personal Tutors are alerted to any student who might require special adjustments to be made and arrangements for teaching and assessment are personalised accordingly. The University's small-group tutorial system enables difficulties to be identified early in students' studies and additional support put in place as required; this is particularly relevant for students who may not have formally disclosed a disability but who are nonetheless experiencing difficulties. There is close collaboration between the students' academic department and Student Welfare to ensure continuity of support.

Frequent contact between tutor and student permits individual attention for students who may be experiencing academic and/or non-academic challenges and assists in the retention of students who might otherwise have left the University. Qualitative evidence (such as anonymised NSS, PTES, PRES and internal module-level commentary) suggests to the University that our students do make a positive correlation between Buckingham's teaching intensity and their own levels of satisfaction with academic provision.

Monitoring of the effectiveness of the University's policies, procedures and practices in supporting its students' needs is undertaken on a quarterly basis by the Inclusion Committee.

Desired Outcomes

The University is committed to making the unique Buckingham learning experience available to as many students, irrespective of their background, as possible. Those who gain a place, but who cannot afford to pay, will receive as much support as the University can offer.

The University's increasing UK outreach work, and continued drive to more clearly articulate its academic offering, personalised learning and generous and innovative programme of financial support aims to ensure the University continues to build on the successes to date.

The University, through its Inclusion Committee, will continue to monitor student performance data, as well as student support arrangements, to ensure that the University delivers outstanding outcomes for all.