

Statement on the Public Interest Provided by Harper Adams University College

Introduction

1. In the early part of the decade, UK agriculture was in a transitional period in which widescale EU reforms were removing public subsidies for agricultural production, commodity prices were falling and there were concerns about low-priced food production leading to farm-business failures and a serious loss of capacity within the industry. Although it is widely regarded that the position has become more positive since the turn of the century, there remains a degree of volatility that means that continued attention needs to be paid to the economic and social health of the rural sector.
2. In addition, new global economic and public policy pressures continue to rapidly change the UK rural environment and rural business practice. Amongst these are the critical issues of food security, establishing resilience in the food supply chain, and climate change. Higher education will play an important role in addressing these issues, and it is in the public interest that the role of institutions working in these areas is acknowledged and supported so that the UK has the skills and innovative capacity to be able to maintain an effective and efficient food supply system.

The Public Interest in Land-based Higher Education Provision

3. In summary, the case for a public interest in land-based higher education provision is evidenced by:
 - The need, acknowledged by Government, industry (paragraphs 4, 7, 8 and 10), and previously by HEFCE¹, for continued and developed investment in the higher-level skills base, including agriculture, to support rural businesses and sustainable rural communities;
 - Global issues facing food and energy production and animal disease, which require innovation and skills development to meet the challenges set out recently by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, including the role of agriculture in tackling climate change (paragraph 7) and the resilience of the food supply chain (paragraph 8);
 - The continuing need to address the social capital dimension of the rural sector, including the interrelated issues of depopulation by young people, availability of employment and access to higher education (paragraphs 13 and 14).
4. The environmental, food chain and rural sectors use c77% of the UK's total land mass and employ over 1 million people. The wider rural sector contains over 1 million businesses, many of which are increasingly service orientated, including those that have diversified from farming into other business areas such as tourism, care provision or food production, or those created by entrepreneurs migrating from urban to rural areas. There is an increasing recognition that the 'rural economy', which has been a focus of Government concern since the foot and mouth epidemic in 2001, is composed of a range of economies which vary enormously in their economic potential and in terms of other social indicators, such as service provision (including healthcare, education etc), employment and relative isolation. The rural economies are, however, tied by common interests and concerns that have been highlighted in a report commissioned by the Prime Minister². The report concluded that:
 - There is untapped potential for improved output from rural firms of between £236-347 billion pa. To address part of this shortfall the report recommended that, 'Financial assistance, information and imaginative schemes are needed to encourage rural firms to commit to employer training' (p8);
 - Innovation would be required to boost product and service development, deliver service needs...and empower and increase the resilience of rural communities. The OECD was noted to have said that learning and innovation processes are, 'a key source of competitive advantage, a multiplier of economic activity, employment and development. This is particularly relevant for rural areas' (p32).
5. When considering the case for investment in skills related to farming, the advice to the Prime Minister was emphatic. It concluded that it was important:

'...not to presume that a declining employment base in farming and associated land management practices justifies a substantial reduction in publicly-supported training in these skills. The physical environment of rural England is a national asset. Countryside and rural skills, sustain healthy communities, urban as well as rural. They enable England to produce the essentials of life, and to conserve our high quality and historic rural landscapes, air, water and soil, wildlife, buildings and cultural qualities. These attract and benefit at least three groups: urban residents and visitors; owners of businesses who relocate to start or run businesses linked to the land and rural environment; and city and regional economic agencies that market proximity to rural areas to attract property developers and business investment clients.'³

¹ The LBSR Report (May 2007, pp33-39) included a STEEP analysis that covered future skills requirements for those working in the land-based and food-chain sectors, all of which feature in the University College's curriculum

² England's rural areas: steps to release their economic potential: Advice from the Rural Advocate to the Prime Minister. Cheltenham: Commission for Rural Communities, May 2008

³ ibid, p31

6. The report endorsed the view that there is a substantial public interest in the maintenance of high-quality services that support the rural economies and, in particular, that learning, skills development and innovation are key components in the delivery of productive and healthy rural communities. There is a pressing need for adequate investment in these components because of rapidly changing demands on rural resources.
7. These changing demands have been articulated in a strategic Cabinet Office study⁴ on the trends shaping food production and consumption in the UK and their implications for society, the economy and the environment. The report noted the close interrelationship between issues of diet, nutrition and public health, the nature, shape and influence of the service industries comprising the modern food chain, the impact of globalisation on food production, food safety and the resilience of food supplies, and climate related impacts of food production systems. The report highlighted that the rural economies need to be in a position to address novel themes and problems arising from these issues. The Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs restated the contribution required of the farming industry in 2008 when he said that, 'Agriculture needs to be at the heart of our efforts to adapt to a changing climate'. He set out a series of global issues likely to impact upon rural areas and to have wide ranging effects on the rest of the UK, and which are at the heart of DEFRA's wish to have a highly-skilled workforce in the land-based sector. These were:
- Farming's role on the front-line of the battle to improve our natural environment and to combat climate change in a world where the price of carbon is bound to rise;
 - The impact of both drought and floods on food production;
 - The growing demand for biofuels, driven by global warming and the high price of oil;
 - Water scarcity - what are we going to do when people start to fight about water rather than ideology? What impact will this have on what is grown, and where, and what it is used for?
 - Land scarcity – how will we manage the competing demands on our land and resources?
 - Population growth and how to feed the 9.5 billion people in the global population by 2050;
 - A rise in meat and dairy consumption in China, India and other fast developing countries. Global demand for meat and milk is projected to more than double over the next 40 years;
 - A decline in producer support as a percentage of farm receipts in both Europe and the USA, but which is rising in China and Brazil;
 - A better informed and more aware society, with rising interest in where food comes from and how it is produced, together with growing demand...for higher environmental standards⁵.
8. The impact of these changes can already be felt, with substantial increases in food prices in the UK, concern about a global food crisis because of the growing world population, increased food demands in emerging economies and the diversion of crops from food to energy production. These pressures have resulted in major challenges that need to be addressed by higher education, in terms of the research agenda, but more particularly in teaching and developing the next generation of farmers and land managers. Examples include the recent reopening of the debate on the use of GM technologies in the UK, which will require further field-scale scientific analysis and a closer engagement with the public. Other developments in biotechnology, such as those aiming to reduce crop fungal infections also require a thorough understanding of the scientific process behind crop production and food safety. Similarly, EU policy changes, which in the last two years have brought over 5% (1.3 million ha) of EU land back into food production, have to be balanced against environmental concerns over biodiversity, soil management and the protection of water quality in heavily cultivated regions. Non-food crops grown for 'pharmaceutical or medicinal extracts, essential oils, dyes, flavours and fragrances, cosmetics and nutritional supplements'⁶ are an expanding part of the agricultural portfolio, the impact of which needs to be considered in higher education programmes. In terms of farm business management, the Cabinet Office report noted (p78) the, 'legitimate public interest in the resilience of the logistic system and infrastructure that support the UK's food supply chain, and in good contingency planning'. The food supply chain is heavily dependent on lean, low inventory, just-in-time logistics systems that are vulnerable to, amongst other factors, extreme weather events, and interruptions to fuel and energy networks, all of which need to be managed effectively by the modern farmer to enable food supplies to remain secure. Higher education also has a significant role in identifying scientific, public policy and farm-based practice responses to crises such as foot and mouth disease, avian flu and bluetongue disease, all of which present fundamental challenges to the resilience of the global food supply chain.
9. It is suggested that the food supply chain is responsible for 18% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions (estimated at 116 mt CO₂ equivalent) with an external cost estimated at £2.9bn⁷. Methane emissions across the UK have fallen by 53% since 1990, but by only 13% in agriculture, which now accounts for 38% of the UK total⁸. Agriculture is also thought to be a major source of nitrous oxide emissions, accounting for two-thirds of the UK total, mainly from agricultural soils. There

⁴ Food: An Analysis of the Issues. Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, January 2008

⁵ Extract from the speech by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the Oxford Farming Conference, 3 January 2008

⁶ State of the Countryside 2008. CRC63, Cheltenham, Commission for Rural Communities, July 2008, p123

⁷ 'How to use the shadow price of carbon in policy appraisal'. London: DEFRA, 2007, which used a shadow price of £25.4/t CO₂ equivalent at 2006 prices

⁸ UK Emissions of Carbon Dioxide, Methane and Nitrous Oxide by National Communication Source Category 1990-2006. London: DEFRA, January 2008. At: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm>

is a significant challenge ahead of UK agriculture to reduce its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, which will require new production methods and the understanding and implementation of novel technologies in farming practice. It is essential that those entering the industry have high level skills in these areas, and exposure to modern techniques and leading edge research in these subjects.

10. It is also important to note that, in addition to emerging challenges, there remains considerable economic pressure on agriculture despite more positive signs in the commodity markets. On the one hand, costs of agricultural land⁹ and production have generally increased in line with commodity prices and, on the other, there remains a significant level of competition in the food retail sector that means that higher food prices are not always reflected in returns at the farm gate. These continuing pressures are behind increasing moves to diversify farm incomes. The latest available data from a DEFRA-Industry Working Group Report¹⁰ suggest that diversification provided 22% of total farm income in 2005/06, compared with 14% in 2003/04. 58% of farms were engaged in some form of diversification activity, and in 28% of diversified farms the income from the new enterprise exceeded that of the core agricultural business. These activities are, however, not only important for maintaining farm incomes, but they are also recognised as an essential means of keeping farms in operation and, in turn, maintaining sustainable rural communities¹¹. The Working Group concluded that there are two main barriers to successful diversification – the planning control system and the development of business skills that are relevant both to agriculture and to the new business direction of the diversified enterprise.
11. The Working Group's findings were supported in the Rural Advocate's 2007 Report¹², which noted that, 'rural authorities and businesses wanted to see programmes to support investment, provide training and encourage innovation' that were aimed at rural areas and concerns, so as to generate higher value employment opportunities and help create more sustainable rural communities. Whilst rural areas are broadly equivalent to, or better than, the English average for business start-ups (when the City of London is excluded) rural businesses are often smaller than in urban areas, and are categorised as 'micro-businesses' often employing fewer than 10 people. In some rural areas they have a tendency to remain small enterprises but on average, in the eight years to 2006, growth across all categories of business size was highest, at 22%, in micro businesses in rural districts¹³. Despite this relative success, a lack of managerial skills is regarded as a key limiting factor for rural businesses¹⁴ and requires context-specific support to enable farm diversification to be successfully implemented, for new rural business opportunities, including those for growth, to be fully exploited and for innovation to flourish.
12. A NESTA report on rural innovation¹⁵ recently commented upon the widely distributed economic base of rural areas and the corresponding absence of higher education institutions and research centres in rural locations able to meet the needs of the rural population and rural businesses. The report noted the success of initiatives such as the Women in Rural Enterprise programme run by Harper Adams, which has focussed on supporting women rural entrepreneurs, a group until very recently neglected by innovation policy. The Rural Advocate called on DIUS (which has subsequently been replaced by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills) to take up the NESTA challenge and to work with the Commission for Rural Communities and DEFRA to ensure, 'that its Innovation Strategy has a recognisable rural dimension'¹⁶. In this there is clearly a public interest role for higher education institutions able to support the rural innovation agenda.
13. Whilst the rural economies are undergoing a massive transformation, there are elements of social capital in rural areas that have an important bearing on the public interest. Rural areas continue to witness changes in the structure of their population because of younger people leaving rural districts to study or seek work, and middle-aged people moving to rural locations for a perceived better quality of life. Students from rural areas are less likely to study in the places from which they originate because of the need to travel to university, but whilst 42% of urban students settle away from home at the end of their studies, the equivalent rural figures are 62% for rural towns and 65% for villages and hamlets¹⁷. Housing costs in rural districts for first-time buyers are generally higher than the England average¹⁸ requiring young people to secure higher income employment if they are to return to their home area after university. In addition to providing opportunities for growth in rural businesses it is therefore essential for higher education to support the development of higher-income jobs to help stem the flow of young people away from rural areas and contribute to the long term sustainability of rural communities.

⁹ 'The gold rush for UK farmland'. At: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7355479.stm>

¹⁰ Barriers to Farm Diversification: Report of the Joint Industry-Government Working Group. London: DEFRA, May 2007

¹¹ Extract from a speech by the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, David Milliband, at The Royal Show, 2006

¹² Report of the Rural Advocate 2007. CRC58, Cheltenham: Commission for Rural Communities , February 2008, p10

¹³ State of the Countryside 2008, p107

¹⁴ Barriers to Farm Diversification: Report of the Joint Industry-Government Working Group. London: DEFRA, May 2007, p8

¹⁵ Mahroum S., J. Atterton, N. Ward et al (2007) Rural Innovation Report. London: NESTA, December 2007, pp12-13

¹⁶ Report of the Rural Advocate 2007, p33

¹⁷ HESA 2007 Student Record Date quoted in: State of the Countryside 2008, p61

¹⁸ Average lower quartile housing affordability in England is 7.7 times income but in a sparsely populated area can reach 9.7 time income. Source: State of the Countryside 2008, p42

14. A further challenge is to ensure that the aspirations of a wider range of young people are matched with an appropriate educational experience. Research has shown that, in rural areas, it is ‘often young people without resources (whether personal networks, educational and/or financial) who stay behind’¹⁹. Given that 18% of rural households were below the poverty line in 2006/07, compared to 19% in more visible urban areas, and rural areas experienced a faster rate of increase in poverty than their urban counterparts over the period 2004/05 to 2006/07, there is a pressing need to improve economic wellbeing in the rural sector²⁰. The study further revealed that young disadvantaged people in rural areas had aspirations to go to university but needed further advice and support whilst facing practical difficulties such as parental support for continuing in education, finance and transport. A particular feature of the report was the need to appreciate that some young people living in rural areas fear the loss of a strong local community and city life to the extent that it can prevent them from wanting to move to an institution in an urban environment. The report²¹ noted a separation of economic development and education and skills policies and concluded that:

‘...in today’s knowledge economy, if businesses are to relocate, expand or start up in rural areas, measures need to be introduced so that a skilled workforce is available to recruit. Otherwise, many rural areas will continue to experience a low-wage and low-skilled economy with poor career opportunities, meaning that the old adage will stay true, that to “get on” young people have to “get out”.’

How We Meet the Public Interest by Creating Additional Public Value

15. Having considered the multi-dimensional, evidence-based case for recognising the public interest in the provision of land-based and rural higher education we address three key factors that demonstrate how Harper Adams University College meets the public interest. In addition, because Harper Adams is in receipt of institution-specific targeted funding, which is necessary for the provision of its activities, these factors demonstrate the additional public value that is provided in exchange for a higher level of public investment. Harper Adams has a specialist role, which is distinctive from that of other HE institutions providing land-based higher education for three main reasons.

16. The first factor is the contribution made by the University College to practice-based higher education in rural subjects. The HEFCE Land-based Studies Review (LBSR) noted that the three specialist land-based institutions in the HE sector provided:

‘...a more focused and “close to the farm” experience for their students in a smaller, more rural, and more “single-minded” academic environment’ which suits, ‘...some who might not even participate in higher education if the only option was a large urban-based university’²⁸

17. Our curriculum structure means that all students undergo an industry placement which provides the basis of research projects undertaken in their final year, and extensive knowledge transfer and research links with businesses in the rural and food chain sectors. Many of these businesses, as noted earlier, are very small and student placements can often contribute significantly to the workforce and to innovation within the business. In some cases, our provision and support for rural businesses is unique. For example, we provide the only undergraduate programmes in agricultural engineering in the UK, and make a significant contribution to employment and innovation in this field. We provide additional public value through our teaching and learning resources which have enabled us to sustain practice-based agricultural education of relevance to the wider world. The results of this approach are evident in the quality of our provision, which is consistently rated at the highest level by the QAA²², our students²³, and in our employment rates²⁴ which, in 2007, were 99% compared to 93.8% nationally, based on a 99.5% survey response. Furthermore, we are one of the top institutions in the sector for the proportion of graduates in graduate-level jobs.

18. Harper Adams is distinctive from other specialist providers of land-based higher education. It is the only specialist land-based provider to hold research degree awarding powers. The value of supporting undergraduate provision enriched by research is widely recognised within the sector. The LBSR identified that contract research and consultancy activities amongst specialist land-based providers are concentrated at Harper Adams²⁵. It also reported that, from the last available data, the University College generated 14% of the industry-sponsored research provided by land-based higher education in England. The applied research undertaken by the University College is used to support practice-based higher education in a range of specialist facilities, including the University College Farm, extensive engineering resources such as a covered soil hall and an off-road vehicle test track and sustainable technology installations of relevance to rural businesses. The Farm is adjacent to the University College campus and is therefore routinely used. Our facilities, which bring with them additional costs, comprise our ‘well found agricultural laboratory’ and are essential to the educational experience we provide. They are in addition to the ‘well-found indoor laboratory’ facilities we also provide for elements of our

¹⁹ Midgley, J. and R. Bradshaw (2006) Should I Stay or Should I Go?: Rural Youth Transitions, Institute for Public Policy Research (North) and the Commission for Rural Communities, p6

²⁰ State of the Countryside 2008, p92

²¹ *ibid*, p31

²² Our last QAA Institutional Audit in 2005 and our mid-cycle report in 2007 resulted in ‘broad confidence’ ratings

²³ We were in the top 10 institutions in the National Student Survey 2007 based on a 71% survey return from eligible students (the national average response rate was 60%)

²⁴ See: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/performanceIndicators/0607/e1_0607.xls

²⁵ Review of Provision for Land-based Studies: Final Report to HEFCE by JM Consulting and SQW Ltd. Bristol: HEFCE, May 2007, p24 and pC-2

undergraduate courses. The LBSR concluded that the specialist land-based institutions have a resource, ‘that it would be hard to recreate if it was lost’²⁶. This is particularly so at Harper Adams where some specialist facilities, such as our modern pig husbandry unit, are of increasing national importance as other institutions close their provision.

19. The second factor relates to the nature of our student body. The LBSR concluded that the student profile and market catchment of the specialist institutions were different from other university land-based subject departments, noting that their students were, ‘more likely to come from a farming background and more likely to intend to pursue a career in agriculture’²⁷. Currently, 79% of our students come from rural areas and 65% have a farming background. The report further noted that the specialist institutions typically devote great effort to providing more teaching and learner support to their students and, operating in widely dispersed rural areas, devote considerable time and resources to national marketing and maintaining close working relationships with the agricultural community and industry at home and overseas. Furthermore, the scale of specialist provision at Harper Adams is significant. The LBSR noted that Harper Adams was the largest single provider of land-based subjects in England, with 9% of national delivery²⁸. The LBSR also concluded, backing up a 1999 study by Grant Thornton²⁹, that about 90% of the University College’s provision was in land-based subjects, mainly in agriculture, agricultural engineering, animal care and land management, making it a significant national, and multidisciplinary, centre of expertise.
20. The third factor is the leadership role Harper Adams plays within land-based higher education. The LBSR noted that provision in this subject area was unusual in that 40% was based in FE Colleges, many of which had relatively small pockets of higher education and which tended to serve more local markets³⁰. The University College has established a wide range of links with FE institutions through the pedagogical work of its Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the third stream activities of the National Rural Knowledge Exchange led by Harper Adams and, more recently, through a new HEFCE-funded programme on rural employer engagement. Harper Adams directly contributes to capacity building in the land-based academic community through its active postgraduate research programme. A strong academic presence in applied research and teaching could be lost to future generations of undergraduate students if it was not sustained by the University College. The University College plays an influential role in many land-based sector organisations, including DEFRA, the Levy Boards, the Sector Skills Council and the major agricultural societies, and is highly regarded by the agricultural industry. In these settings we act as an advocate for higher education provision and skills development to underpin the sector’s efforts to address the innovation, enterprise development and social capital issues noted earlier. We are also actively engaged in international teaching and research, particularly in China where we have joint initiatives in the agricultural sector, food chain and rural environment.
21. There are two main elements of additional cost that underline the importance of institution specific targeted funding in helping the University College secure additional public value.
22. The first is the investment required to improve, maintain and operate modern industry-standard farm facilities and equipment that demonstrate best practice to future generations of land-based practitioners. Our farm is operated to demonstrate commercial practice, but needs to be underwritten by the University College in terms of the educational impact (eg through additional labour overheads) and diversity of enterprises that it must offer to meet the varying needs of our academic portfolio. Most modern farms have become increasingly specialised (in, for example, dairy production) in order to reduce overheads and focus on specific production techniques. The University College would not be able to take this route without losing students who wish to study another aspect of agriculture (for example, crop production), which, in turn, could damage the availability of much-needed skills in the agricultural sector because the type and quality of education we provide is not readily available elsewhere. The issue of whether or not specialist HEIs should operate their own farms was thoroughly addressed in the LBSR, where it was noted³¹ that institutions that have a practice-based element to their provision need to have farming facilities to remain credible as an agriculture provider. There are also significant issues around biosecurity, commercial confidentiality, access to ongoing research and provision for large numbers of agricultural students (as in the case of Harper Adams) that would arise if farming operations were provided off-site and/or by an external party. Furthermore, our internal analyses show, as they did in the Grant Thornton study, that our farm actively supports the undergraduate curriculum, through a substantial element of on-farm teaching and with over 50% of final year BSc honours projects being based on University College farm enterprises³². The scale and cost of these facilities is significant. In the last two years the University College has invested in new free-range poultry facilities (£250k), new pig unit facilities (£250k), a new dairy unit (£2.5m) and related farm infrastructure to ensure that it can keep pace with industry developments and meet higher regulatory and environmental standards, secure water supplies for irrigation, maintain adequate biosecurity to tackle problems of animal disease and provide replacement equipment (total £220k). Equipment costs in agriculture and agricultural engineering courses are also extremely high. The cost of a

²⁶ *ibid*, p61

²⁷ *ibid*, p61

²⁸ *ibid*, pB-5. The three specialist land-based studies providers deliver 20% of provision and 50% of delivery occurs across only 12 HEIs

²⁹ Review of Agricultural Colleges, Higher Education Funding Council for England, March 1999, p40

³⁰ *ibid*, pp27-28 and p65

³¹ *ibid*, p72

³² Utilisation of the University College Farm & Associated Facilities in Agriculture Programmes 2006/07, Harper Adams University College, November 2007

combine harvester, for example, is over £170k. We make active use of our connections with the industry to obtain subsidised-cost machinery or even borrow prototypes so that our engineers can have access to equipment they will encounter during their career, but it is not always possible to do this because of high demand for agricultural machinery. A routine replacement teaching equipment programme is required in the event that these sources are not available.

23. The second element relates to the nature of our student entry and the additional costs of managing a national student market in widely dispersed rural areas and from a rural location. To secure our student entry in difficult-to-recruit subjects where low family incomes remain an important factor, we must have considerable visibility in rural regions across the UK, which means that our revenue investment in marketing and recruitment is high. We need to work with a large number of small businesses, which typify the rural business sector, to ensure that our learning and teaching provision is relevant to their needs and that it reflects the imperatives placed upon the rural sector at a time of considerable change. Our good practice in this area has recently been highlighted³³, but it carries additional costs of addressing a national small-business base to engage industry representatives in the University College's undergraduate provision. In terms of 'added value' however, this continuing investment in business liaison enables the University College to offer a wider range of student placements, access to knowledge transfer and research activities that underpin the undergraduate curriculum and access to employer engagement opportunities that would not be possible without the support provided by additional funding. As noted earlier, we have significant regulatory obligations in our farming practice, but this extends to a need to provide small-group teaching to address farm-based health and safety concerns, a key focus of HSE national strategy, with the consequence that our staff-student ratios in practical sessions need to be lower than in some similar subject areas. Our student base was acknowledged by the LBSR to be from a wide variety of backgrounds and broader range of educational attainment than land-based university faculties. Despite the availability of widening participation funding, which meets some of the additional costs of supporting our students, our investment in learner support services through the application of additional funding has made a significant contribution to our recruitment, sustainability and academic success, as well as meeting key HEFCE and Government policy objectives. As we noted in a recently approved HEFCE SDF submission³⁴, there are few land-based studies institutions that have the critical mass to achieve a broad 'reach' in national recruitment but which are also capable of managing and developing participation from under-represented groups. We are the top-rated institution in the UK for the recruitment of students from lower socio-economic groups³⁵, have the joint sixth highest proportion of students in receipt of the DSA and had the highest percentage increase in the sector in continuation rates over the period 2001/02 to 2004/05 (11.7%), an indicator noted in evidence recently considered by the Committee of Public Accounts³⁶.
24. Both of these elements are directly supported by institution-specific targeted funding and have a major bearing on our ability to provide the exceptional standard, breadth and depth of curriculum we offer which, as our evidence has shown, is in demand from both students and their employers. Both factors help maximise additional public value that meets the public interest tests outlined earlier in this paper. It would be difficult for the University College to retain high-cost subjects such as agricultural engineering or the practical nature of its higher education provision in agriculture without continued funding of this nature. Such a position would be counter to the guidance provided to HEFCE by the LBSR, which recognised a combination of factors that have the capacity to make land-based subjects vulnerable, including, 'the costs of maintaining farms and other specialist land-based facilities'³⁷.
25. We provide additional public value by clearly meeting the public interest test established earlier in this paper (summarised in paragraph 3) and have demonstrated the need for institution-specific targeted funding to enable us to continue to operate to meet the public interest. In particular:
- We have a clear role, high quality and critical mass of provision that enables us to address the requirement for a higher-level skills base in core rural subjects such as agriculture, agricultural engineering, animal care and land management. Some of our provision, for example, undergraduate agricultural engineering, is unique in the UK. High entry costs are likely to prevent other institutions from moving into the subject area so this provision, in our view, remains potentially vulnerable and in need of additional public support;
 - Our curriculum, resources available to support our learning and teaching, and applied research and knowledge transfer activities are tackling critical global issues of concern from a UK perspective and internationally through our links with major institutions in, for example, China;
 - Our recruitment base, with a high proportion of rural students and, ultimately, rural employees, together with our influential role within the rural sector are actively addressing the social capital dimension of Government rural policy and wider concerns to rural businesses and rural communities.

Harper Adams University College
August 2009

³³ Outcomes from institutional audit: Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Second Series. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency, August 2008, p8 and p10

³⁴ Rural Outreach and Student Experience Project, HEFCE SDF Submission, May 2008

³⁵ HESA data, 2006/07

³⁶ Tenth Report of Session 2007/08 of the Select Committee on Public Accounts, UK Parliament, January 2008

³⁷ op cit, pG-1