

**HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY  
ACCESS AGREEMENT – 2015 - 2016**

**1. Introduction and context**

1. The mission of Harper Adams University is 'higher education and research for the delivery of a sustainable food chain and rural economy'. Our vision for 2017 is that Harper Adams will be: 'A university working with the industries and professions that comprise the global agri-food chain and the UK rural economy to deliver a high quality learning environment that enhances personal development and employability; a centre of excellence in the application of science and technological advances; and a source of independent and authoritative commentary to inform the debate on agri-food, animal welfare, land, environmental and rural business matters'.
2. At the time of writing, the University has about 2,466 undergraduate students actively studying on predominantly full-time sandwich programmes, of whom about 90% are home / EU students. First degree and Foundation Degree programmes are offered at the University's rural campus near Newport in Shropshire. There are, at time of writing, approximately a further 1,606 part-time students engaged in workforce development programmes, many of which are delivered, at least in part, offsite. Progress has been made to secure a sustainable basis for long-term work with part-time learners on professionally relevant programmes following the cessation of HEFCE funding for employer co-funded programmes. Most of this work in the future will be on 'other undergraduate' programmes of study, including through discrete modules and short awards of no more than 60 credits and, thus, outside the scope of this agreement. Nonetheless, this area of the University's activity reaches out to a distinct and more diverse profile of learners, with, at the time of writing, higher levels of mature students (94%), state schooling (99%) and lower levels of learners from rural backgrounds (7%) than our full-time student body. Whilst this work is an area of strategic importance to us, and it reaches a broader base of learners, many of whom have indicated that they would not have accessed HE through more traditional routes, we have, nonetheless, seen a large reduction in part-time enrolments at undergraduate level because of the revised funding arrangements in the future. There are, however, plans to work with a partner to provide increased, significant numbers of taught postgraduate students in one particular professional field.
3. Since the 2012/13 entry cohort, both further education college partnerships are run as validation, rather than franchising, arrangements. In particular, we transferred some of our Student Number Control allocation to Reaseheath College. The continuing commitment to validating provision at Reaseheath College and Askham Bryan College with, respectively, sites in Cheshire and several counties across the North of England constitutes a desire to support the access plans of selected, specialist land-based Further Education Colleges, which provide an access route to those who could otherwise be deterred from higher education.

**2. Fees, student numbers, fee income and fee rises in subsequent years**

4. The University has agreed the following annual tuition fee rates for UK and EU new entrants joining full time/sandwich undergraduate programmes in 2015/16.

## Programmes at Harper Adams University

	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
All first degree (BSc/BEng/MEng) programmes, campus-based studies	£9,000	£6,750
All full-time Foundation Degree courses, including extended Foundation Degree programmes, campus-based studies	£9,000	£6,750
One year full-time sandwich placement year	£1,800	£1,800

5. The fee rates for new entrants in 2015/16 are set at the same level that applied in 2012/13, with the exception of the placement year, which is set at the Government's capped fee level but which still remains well below the cost of delivery. The part-time fee levels indicated above are the maximum that a student would pay, although many would typically pay a lower fee, dependent on their study load. The fees set out in Table 2 in the accompanying resource plan, therefore, represent the maximum that will be charged and might be lower than this. These fee levels will not apply: to continuing students who commenced their studies before 1 September 2012; to those pre-2012 continuing students who transfer studies to other full time/sandwich awards; or to a small number of pre-2012 students who progress to approved end-on-courses in 2015/16, such as a top-up from an Extended Foundation Degree to an Honours Degree programme.
6. Students who commence a Foundation Degree programme in 2015/16, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2016/17. Students who commence an Honours Degree in 2015/16, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2017/18. Students studying during their sandwich year will be subject to a fee of £1,800. Virtually all students studying at Harper Adams on an undergraduate programme complete a placement year. Accordingly, the average fee, before fee waivers, for most Honours Degree students is £7,200 per annum and the average fee for most Foundation Degree students is £6,600 per annum.
7. We anticipate that up to 670 new full-time students will join the first year of first degree, Foundation Degree and Extended Foundation Degree programmes at Harper Adams University in 2015/16, although this clearly depends on the combined effects of an uncapped market and potential students' and other institutions' responses to a more competitive environment. We anticipate that 40 (20 FTE) will be enrolled on fee-regulated part-time courses at Harper Adams, including those who are part-sponsored by employers.
8. This access agreement will be renewed annually. However, it is possible that tuition fee levels for 2015/16 entrants may be uplifted each year in line with inflationary increases announced by the government.
9. The associated resource plan, prepared in line with the approved template indicates: the estimated numbers of full-time students at each fee level; the estimated number of regulated part-time students for whom we anticipate the fee will exceed £4,500 in an academic year; and our estimated fee income above the basic level for full-time and part-time courses.

### 3. Expenditure on additional access and retention measures

10. In setting out our commitments to widen access and support student success, we must recognise that Harper Adams is a small and specialist institution with a unique subject mix and an associated high cost base. All of our provision is currently funded at HEFCE Price Group B. The income derived from the maximum fee level that we are permitted to charge is less than the combined income that we have previously received from HEFCE's teaching grant and the fees which students have paid. This is a different situation for those institutions with largely Price Group C and D provision, as their income will increase if they charge at the top end of the permissible fee range, as virtually all have done. Accordingly, overall absolute expenditure on financial support, access, student success and progression measures will necessarily decline over the next five year period, since both HEFCE grant and tuition fee levels are forecast to decline in real terms and the contribution of fee income constitutes a much larger percentage of an overall declining level of tuition-related income. It will be necessary to focus available funds on those activities that we have evaluated will have most impact on student enrolments, success on-course, progression into employment or further study, for a population that reflects the rural economy that Harper Adams is established to serve. The consequence of this is that the proportion of fee income spent on access agreement activities will decline over time as a result of a combination of these factors to a steady state of 19%, in line with our assessment of our access record (paragraphs 13-17) and affordability.
11. We are not permitted to charge more than £1,800 for the placement year, although we calculate the cost of preparing students for placement and supporting them and employers during the placement year to be in the region of £3,000 a student. Some under-represented and disadvantaged student groups are more challenging to support. We are, nonetheless totally committed to sandwich courses; they are integral to the delivery of all our applied curricula and, vitally, help graduates to secure employment on completion of their studies. The Government's response set out in *Following up the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration* makes clear that, "graduates from sandwich courses are more likely to enter employment six months after graduation... and less likely to be unemployed... than other graduates." (BIS, p 14).
12. The expenditure set out in this agreement means that we estimate we will make an indicative investment of £1.1m per annum (estimated at 19% of fee income, above the basic level, in steady state by 2018-19, following the cessation of the National Scholarship Programme) on outreach, student success and progression, in order to encourage, support and enable a wider range of students to benefit from higher education and progress into worthwhile careers or further study. This level of investment may change over time as we continue to evaluate the impact on access of scholarships and the fee charged for our placement year. The indicative forecast institutional summary spend is as follows for 2015/16: countable outreach spend of £400k; student success spend of £225k; progression spend of £180k; and financial support of £315k; forecast to be £1.12m which is around 22% of tuition income above the basic fee level for the 2015/16 cohort.

### ***Assessing our access record***

13. Overall, 68% of our new undergraduate enrolments, in each of the 2012/13 and 2013/14 entry cohorts, fall into one or more OFFA-countable categories. Whilst there is no publically available comparative data, we believe that, whilst the majority of our student population is from a rural background, this figure is indicative of a diverse population, with two-thirds of our students facing one sort of challenge or another associated with either disadvantage or under-representation in higher education.
14. Taking each of the targets set out in the accompanying resource plan in turn, we have made progress with some targets, but not with all. The assessment below uses 2009/10 HESA data as the baseline and draws on the most recently published 2012/13 HESA data in assessing the rate of progress thus far. We have also, as part of our initial plans to improve the evaluation framework for our access activities, drawn more heavily on internal data, related to the full-time 2012/13 and 2013/14 entry cohorts, in light of the new funding regime that applies to these students. The rate of progress on each has been considered when determining our planned expenditure on, and related activities for, outreach, retention and financial support arrangements within this agreement. In summary:
  - a. The proportion of all full time undergraduate students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance in 2012/13 **increased** to 19.4% from 15.8% in 2011/12, and in excess of the benchmark of 9.2% (Table T7). It constitutes the eighth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution.
  - b. The proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 **increased** to 46.3% from 44.6%% in 2011/12, against our benchmark of 37.8% (HESA Table T1a). This represents the fourteenth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution and the second highest statistically significant 'over-performance' on the benchmark.
  - c. Our analysis of POLAR 3 data shows that the proportion of young full time entrants from low participation neighbourhoods **fell** to 2.4% against a benchmark of 8.5% (HESA Table T1a). Our own most recent analysis of POLAR 3 data in relation to the rurality of local authorities concludes that, once account has been taken that around 81% of our new entrants are typically from rural backgrounds, where there are high levels of participation, such that only 7.3% of the rural population lives in the lowest participation neighbourhoods, and that of all UK HEIs, only 10.9% of entrants in 2012/13 came from the lowest participation neighbourhoods, our benchmark for entrants from low participation neighbourhoods should be in the order of 5-6%. The 8% target was set at a time when we had not taken into account the rural dimension of our natural catchment and its relationship to neighbourhood participation and, thus, remains challenging for us. We intend to undertake further analysis of participation rates from rural wards to ensure that we continue to set targets that are realistic, yet ambitious, in light of our recent outreach work plans. It is of note that, within the context of a very inclusive admissions policy, a recent survey of those who declined offers indicated that the rural location of the campus was a key factor in their decision.

- d. The proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants from state schools or colleges **fell** from 83.2% to 81.0% (HESA Table 1b), against our benchmark of 87.0%. As with the low participation benchmark, this HESA benchmark does not take into account the rural backgrounds of the majority of our new entrants. There is a marked difference in schooling background amongst our rural and urban background students (by over ten percentage points), which reflects, in part, the remoteness of many rural locations from secondary schools, necessitating boarding school education, which is almost totally outside of the state sector. Our rural background students are over twice as likely to have attended an independent school than urban-background students. Accordingly, this target is challenging. We intend to undertake further analysis of secondary school patterns in rural areas to ensure that we continue to set targets that are realistic, yet ambitious, in light of our recent outreach work plans. By way of context, it is of note that the only other specialist rural university has a state school participation rate which is 30 percentage points lower than our own, underlining the distinctive secondary schooling patterns amongst rural communities.
- e. In 2012/13, **as in 2011/12**, there were only 105 new mature undergraduate entrants, of whom only five (5.2%) were without previous HE experience and from a low participation neighbourhood, against a benchmark of 6.0% (HESA Table T2a). As with young entrants, the benchmark is inflated as it does not take into account the rural backgrounds of students. Accordingly, whilst we estimate that the benchmark should be in the 4.0-5.0% range we have, nonetheless, maintained our challenging target for the short-term. We have an extensive work programme and profile with mature learners in non-regulated programmes which are not countable within this agreement.
- f. The original final target set out in Table 7 of the resource plan, in relation to young part-time entrants, is obsolete since our funding relationship with Reaseheath College changed (as paragraph 3). Accordingly, we **removed this target** in the access agreement that was approved for 2014/15.
- g. The proportion of young full time first degree entrants who remained in HE after one year of study was **maintained** at 94.6% (HESA Table T3a), modestly below the baseline figure of 94.8%, although above our benchmark indicator at 93.9%. Of particular concern to us, however, is the proportion of young other undergraduates (ie those on Foundation, as opposed to Honours, Degree courses) who do not continue in HE beyond their first year of study. Whilst we have improved our performance, increasing to 87.5% for the 2011/12 entry from 84.2% for the 2010/11 entry, we are modestly below our benchmark for this student group (at 88.5%, as per HESA Table 3d). In light of very high levels of disability and vocational entry qualifications for this student group, we continue to work especially hard to improve the outcomes for students on our Foundation Degree programmes, who fall into this category. Accordingly, we included an additional milestone/target into the equivalent of Table 7 in the accompanying resource plan in the 2014/15 agreement.

- h. The proportion of mature-on-entry, full time first degree students who remained in HE after one year of study was 88.5%, compared with a benchmark of 89.1% (HESA Table 3a) and a **modest reduction** on 2011/12, at 89.5%.
15. We believe that, despite the relatively low proportions of students from low participation neighbourhoods and state schooling, Harper Adams University has an outstanding track record for access and widening participation, student retention and employability, given the high levels of student disability and students from NS-SEC groups IV-VII, whether or not one takes into account the predominantly rural background of most of our students. The entrant profile and retention data above should be considered alongside our employability record. **Our graduates have consistently been within the top ten most successful** from all UK higher education institutions at securing employment, with 96.2% in employment or further study within six months of completing in both 2012 and in 2013 against a HESA benchmark of 93.2% for 2012 completers and 92.9% for those completing in 2013. When one takes into account our sector-leading response rates (97.8% for full-time 2013 graduates), Harper Adams' 2013 graduates achieved the second highest level employment rate in the UK.
16. Overall, therefore, in both absolute and relative terms, we believe that we have made a significant and consistent contribution to both fair access and widening participation. Moreover, our performance in terms of student retention and employability underlines the measures we have put in place to support students who may be at risk of academic failure and also, through sandwich placement work experience and the development of employability skills in the curriculum, in preparing our graduates for the world of work.
17. Notwithstanding our achievements to date, we recognise that there is still scope for improvement in terms of the proportion of our students drawn from state schools and colleges and from low participation neighbourhoods. We also believe that the scope is modest for maintaining the proportion of our mature entrants, in the light of the new funding regime which is proving a barrier to older entrants for long programmes of study which fall within scope of this agreement. Our experience is that mature learners are more inclined to study whilst in work, often supported by their employer, and that there is a preference for doing this, in our specialist undergraduate subject areas, within 'bite-sized' programmes that are fewer than 120 credits and currently outside the scope of this agreement. In light of our experience that mature learners are more likely to be attracted to lower credit value programmes, we would welcome such provision being recognised within access agreements. We will work to improve the retention rate of students from lower achieving programme areas, especially those in the 'other undergraduate' category and mature students as identified by our Academic Board. Whilst many students on these programmes enter with modest entry qualifications and some are poorly prepared for HE studies through their level three learning, initial indications are that our work to achieve these improvements is bearing fruit. We have invested in additional student data analysis and planning capacity which we hope will assist in identifying other variables, including other student characteristics and curricula design and delivery features, to enable us to better target our work in improving student success outcomes further. This ambition is addressed both through the activities we intend to put in place, as set out in paragraphs 18 - 44 below, and the milestone and target set out at Table 7a in the resource plan.

#### 4. Access Measures

##### ***Pre-applicant outreach activity***

18. The University has always been highly committed to promoting access, not only to Harper Adams, but to the wider land-based and food sectors. The agriculture, food and land-based focus of our course provision traditionally attracts those from farming and/or rural communities with their own demographic characteristics, which are not representative of the wider UK population, as set out in paragraphs 13-17. Whilst we have been extremely effective in supporting students from NS-SEC groups IV-VII, and those with disabilities, successfully through their higher education and into professional employment, our natural rural recruitment base means that some of the other common measures of 'access success', and associated benchmarks cannot, reasonably, be applied to Harper Adams. Of both the 2012 and 2013 new entrant cohorts, we have calculated that 68% of our students fell into at least one OFFA-countable group of disadvantage or under-representation, even though we exhibit, relative to some broader subject-based institutions, lower levels of new entrants from low participation neighbourhoods and state schooling backgrounds, because of the rural dimensions of our subject base, our location and the natural rural backgrounds of our students.
19. In addition, Harper Adams faces particular challenges when it comes to the more usual methods of raising aspirations towards HE study of under-represented groups. A conventional key route is for universities to work with schools. Regrettably, with limited staff and financial resources, schools often prefer to work with a single university with a broad course offering that will appeal to as wide a range of their pupils as possible. Given these challenges, Harper Adams is working hard to find more creative and innovative ways to raise aspirations with a broader audience. This includes raising awareness of career opportunities in the food and land-based sectors amongst those who may already be aware of the potential benefits of university but be unaware of the options in this career sector. According to *The UK land-based and environmental sector skills assessment update, Spring 2014 report*, this work is also essential to fill the increasing skills gaps in this sector, where 354,000 graduates and post-graduates will be needed between 2010 and 2020 (Lantra, 2014, p 11).
20. Accordingly, the university is actively supporting a new industry-led new programme, called the Bright Crop Initiative. This is a cross-industry initiative which aims to inspire young people to consider a career in farming and the food chain. The programme was launched in summer 2013. Harper Adams aims to promote the initiative generally and to provide student and graduate success case studies for use by Bright Crop in highlighting the rewarding professional careers that the agri-food chain offers. The initiative is building a network of volunteers, employed in the land-based sectors, to act as ambassadors in schools. We have encouraged our students to participate in focus group work and are also promoting the work of Bright Crop to students so that they will consider becoming ambassadors once they graduate.
21. During the 2014/15 recruitment cycle, leading to recruitment for 2015/16 and beyond, the university will also focus attention on the strategic development of its collaborative work. A strategic alliance was established in 2013 between Harper Adams, Keele, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton universities, with an agreement to develop joint, aspiration-raising programmes, aimed specifically at years 5 and 6 in primary schools and 7 and 8 in secondary schools. This Primary to Higher Education Alliance (P2HE) is providing co-ordinated higher education awareness-raising activity in part of our region for the first time. Eight primary schools are

now actively engaged in activity which has included children from all eight schools visiting Harper Adams University, each for a full day's programme. Each of these schools has high levels of free school meals.

22. One of the key features of the partnership has been provision for the tracking of the progress of the young people we engage with. We have established, with the agreement of the schools and children's parents, a central database which holds the pupil data. We also have the agreement of the primary schools to advise us on the secondary schools to which the participating children progress, so that we can continue to track them and measure progress over the ten years that we might potentially work with them. We, therefore, welcome the proposed development of the National Collaborative Outreach Network and the HEAT tracker system as this may help to us to facilitate tracking across a broader range of our activity.
23. In addition, Harper Adams and Wolverhampton universities have separately agreed, in principle, to work together to develop a programme to raise awareness and aspirations specifically across primary and secondary schools in the Telford and Wrekin authority area, some of which are located in quintile one POLAR 3 low participation neighbourhoods.
24. The university worked in partnership with the Telford and Wrekin Children's University in 2013. This group has now disbanded but we are currently working with its successor organisation, with a view to continue similar work in the future.
25. Another new area that we have begun exploring is the creation of an online resource for teachers to educate them on the career opportunities that exist within the agri-food sectors, so that they can use this information in providing advice and guidance to school pupils within their care; this initiative complements that of the Bright Crop Initiative and is directly linked to the P2HE partnership.
26. A completely new initiative has seen the launch of the Harper Adams Young Innovator of the Year competition. This aims to introduce 11-19 year olds, from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible, to the possibilities of engineering as an exciting subject, leading to a worthwhile career. The competition has been promoted directly to all secondary schools in the country. Its initial success means that we already plan to run the competition again next year and to potentially extend it to other curriculum and career areas. The competition is free to enter, so minimising barriers to entry and shortlisted entrants who are invited to the prize-giving will be offered subsidised travel costs, if that would be a barrier to them attending the competition finals.
27. This is the strategic direction of travel for Harper Adams' outreach activity and is in addition to the established activity which will continue to be developed during the lifetime of this agreement. More specifically this includes:-
  - Building on University Technical College (UTC) partnership work, including supporting the JCB Academy autumn event focused on off-road vehicle engineering through which around 130-140 year ten pupils spend a residential week at Harper Adams, as part of their induction to the JCB Academy programme; follow-up activities involve Harper Adams staff judging the work that was launched during the induction programme, with the winning team receiving a fun, off-road vehicle experience day at Harper Adams. Year 12 students also experience a HE taster day.

- Continuing the Harper Adams mentoring scheme which seeks to link a University student with a school pupil who shows potential and who falls within one of the target groups of disadvantage or under-representation. This programme aims to raise aspirations to higher education study and attainment whilst at school.
- Continuing to support the STEM mentoring scheme with the provision of specialist input related to the land-based sector.
- Providing and delivering master classes for schools and colleges in our specialist areas.
- Providing university experience days to schools and colleges, across as broad an audience as possible.
- Hosting technical event days in the areas of agriculture, engineering, food and land-based studies in order to expose a broader audience to the opportunities offered.
- Developing innovative ways of reaching a broader and younger audience. For example using public agricultural shows, of which we attend around 20 each year to engage the under-14 age group, particularly at primary age, and raise their basic awareness of career opportunities in the land-based sectors.
- Using social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, to engage young people pro-actively and develop a two-way dialogue. In particular, we are looking to actively participate in Q&A sessions around particular subjects which young people are most likely engaged with.
- Developing our student ambassador training to increase their awareness of the need to widen participation and to help them develop the skills needed to advise and guide those from diverse backgrounds and with different initial interests.
- Building on the innovative approach to advertising established in 2012-13 through an industry-celebrated TV campaign. Specifically, this campaign aims to appeal to the broader population's interest in long-term global food security whilst also raising awareness of the career opportunities this offers and the role of higher education in accessing these opportunities.
- Continuing to work to create case studies of role models of students and graduates from non-traditional backgrounds who can inspire others, for use in our own promotional material and through the industry-led Bright Crop initiative ([www.brightcrop.org.uk](http://www.brightcrop.org.uk)).
- Providing financial support for those with a low household income wishing to attend our summer school (The Harper Adams Experience) and, because we interview all applicants, providing travel bursaries for recent care leavers who are invited to attend for an interview.
- Actively participate in traditional student recruitment events such as UCAS fairs and school careers fairs. This includes attending city- based events which enable us to promote land-based study and career opportunities to those from outside our more common rural catchment.

- Providing a combination of full open days and smaller, less intimidating campus tour afternoons, to appeal to as broad a range of individuals and their families as possible.
  - Actively seeking feedback from the pre-applicants and applicants with whom we engage to enable us to review and develop communications activities to ensure that they appeal to as broad an audience as possible, and in particular, obtain feedback on ways of better reaching students from under-represented groups.
28. We are particularly keen, wherever possible, to link HE study options with career opportunities and are particularly pleased when we are able to organise our outreach activities in partnership with employers. For example, in addition to the Bright Crop Initiative and the JCB Academy work listed in paragraphs 20 and 27, our Food Science and Agri-food Chain Management department has received financial support from the Worshipful Company of Butchers to run 'Design a Burger' event for school children. Our Animals Production, Welfare and Veterinary Sciences department is working with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Animals and Birmingham City Council, as part of the society's plans for its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, including contributing to the 'Animal Magic' in-school programme in deprived areas of Birmingham. Our Engineering department works with the Douglas Bomford Trust (which seeks to advance the application of engineering and physical science to land based activities for the sustainable benefit of the environment and mankind) to host an annual conference promoting world-wide careers in agricultural engineering. In November 2013, we hosted 202 college and academy students, 70 employer and university representatives as well as 50 presenters and Trustees to this event.

***Post-applicant activity to support student retention & success on course***

29. The University provides high levels of post-entry support to students. All new students are offered screening, during induction to Harper Adams, to assess whether they might be dyslexic and to gauge the extent to which they will require additional support to develop their numeracy skills. The University has employed an additional four members of staff, (bringing the specialist team to a total of nine), to provide bespoke Learner Support to students, and there are plans to augment this team further based on a performance gap analysis and intervention impact assessment. The tutors will work with targeted students either individually or in small groups, in order to meet increased student need and demand. The support provided includes specialist assistance to those students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and other disabled students, targeted study skills support for students with level 3 vocational qualifications, as well as numeracy support. Our experience is that, where students take up this service, they benefit from it, through improved confidence, better developed academic study skills and consequent improved achievement levels. The impact on our arrangements for supporting disabled students, following the ministerial announcement on revisions to the DSA, will require detailed consideration. This agreement incorporates some reallocation of expenditure from the non-countable to countable categories in the accompanying resource plan, on the basis of our initial interpretation of the announcement.
30. In addition, the University's Student Services team provides non-academic advice, guidance and support to all students, on a range of personal and financial matters. We have experienced a growing number of students requiring

counselling support, some of whom also suffer with a significant mental health disability. We have reorganised our welfare arrangements so that the Student Services team includes two posts with a specific remit to provide counselling and mental health support, policy development and guidance to other staff. This welfare provision has been very well received and will be extended further and has, undoubtedly, enabled a number of students to continue with their studies, despite significant mental health problems. More generalised support offered through the Student Services team has taken place and will be maintained for the foreseeable future, so that students have easy access to advice and guidance on a range of pastoral, accommodation, health, personal and financial concerns. Planned changes to our chaplaincy service will also strengthen our pastoral support to students further. Inevitably, these services are called upon most heavily by those from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds.

31. As set out in paragraph 14, the University will continue to seek ways in which we can further improve retention rates, particularly for vocationally qualified entrants on Foundation Degrees, who exhibit slightly higher rates of students from under-represented backgrounds, when compared with those on Honours Degree programmes and for mature students. One area of recent curriculum development is the incorporation of practical skills into the formal curriculum. In 2012/13 we also piloted some academic guidance work with post-applicant, pre-entrant students in this group in an effort to improve the success levels of students who enter with level 3 vocational qualifications, as well as introduced a peer mentoring scheme to support their learning early in their studies. As a result of its perceived success, we extended the programme to more pre-entrants in 2013/14 and, with the increasing population of 17-18 years studying vocational qualifications as an alternative to A levels, will need to extend the programme in 2014/15 and beyond.
32. We are investing in software upgrades that will better enable us to monitor the relative achievement of students, not only at an individual level, but also those with different characteristics, so that we are able to plan more targeted interventions where necessary, whilst avoiding stigmatising any new support programmes we might develop. We have created a new post of Student Data and Planning Analyst, which will increase our capacity to make better evidence-informed decisions to target our resources on activities that are most likely to yield results. We believe that these programmes of support, intended to improve student retention so that it is above, rather than around, our benchmarks (in spite of very inclusive entry requirements, including high proportions of vocationally qualified entrants and high levels of student disability), mean that we are appropriately resourced for an institution of this size and available funds. Our most recent assessment is that students who took up this sort of support had a 7% greater chance of success than those who did not.
33. We have a commitment to improve the on-course success rates of all our students, including those who are considered 'OFFA-countable'. Our initial analysis of student achievement variables confirms that receipt of means-tested financial support is not yet proven to be effective in improving chances of success. Our initial assessment is that other factors such as household income, disability and level and type of entry qualification are more significant determinants of success. Our increased capacity for identifying possible causal relationships will enable us to better target the work of our educational development and quality enhancement team. This small team works with academic and academic services staff to revise approaches to curriculum design

and learning, teaching and assessment strategies and, inevitably, work that benefits less represented or disadvantaged groups tends to benefit all students.

***Post-applicant activity to support student progression into employment or postgraduate study***

34. The rural skills module that is integral to the curriculum for many Foundation Degree students, in support of their preparation for placement success, is augmented by an extra-curricular Land-based Skills Programme, incorporating work-related skills, leading to externally accredited 'licence to practise' qualifications for all student groups. This support serves to motivate students within their transition to higher education and enables them to be well prepared for placement learning and subsequent post-graduation employment. These programmes are expensive to provide and are offered at significantly subsidised rates so that cost is not a barrier to participation.
35. Of key importance to our success in consistently securing sector-leading levels of graduate employment is the work that we do to support students in their year-long placement period. In addition to the skills programmes (paragraphs 31 and 34), all students are supported in a pre-placement programme, with input from dedicated placement staff, as well as through on-placement support provided by placement tutors. Placement tutors visit all students whilst on placement, are a source of guidance, and provide advice on the completion of assessment tasks which are intended to link campus-based studies with their professional practice, as well as encourage them to take responsibility for personal development planning, in preparation for graduate employment.
36. Through our Careers Service, which provides group and individualised support to students and recent alumni, we have also provided opportunities for students to participate in Executive Stretch team activities, which are intended to develop skills sought by employers. This sort of work, combined with our excellent network of employers, helps to ensure that our graduates are not only successful in their studies but also in employment. We have plans to extend the support given to students in preparation for assessment test centres used in graduate recruitment. A worrying trend amongst some graduate recruiters has been to filter candidates based on their level two or three qualifications. Given our inclusive entry requirements, our Careers Service has been working with individual employers to educate them on the drawbacks of this approach, whilst also mitigating the impact such an approach might have on otherwise excellent candidates.
37. Whilst most of our graduates seek to enter employment, as opposed to postgraduate level study, we have introduced a bursary scheme for our own graduates who might aspire to go on to full-time postgraduate level study. Whilst this scheme does not fall within the scope of the access agreement's 'countable' spend, we believe it illustrates our commitment to support students into employment areas that require postgraduate level qualifications.

***Financial support to students who enter in 2015/16***

38. With the cessation of the HEFCE-funded National Scholarship Scheme, Harper Adams has considered its own evidence on the impact of all its means-tested bursary schemes. Whilst there is only one entry cohort (2012/13) on which to undertake a meaningful analysis, our provisional findings are that the focus on verified household income as a test of need and likely impact (on either likelihood

to enter Higher Education or succeed in it) is not necessarily the most effective way of improving access and student success. Paragraphs 40 to 44 set out our evaluation plans on the impact of the financial support committed to earlier cohorts with a view to make a considered decision on arrangements for 2015/16 entrants.

39. We have sought to assess the impact of our NSP and other bursary schemes, through surveys of all new students, whether or not they were an award recipient, and also through a survey of students in receipt of any type of means tested award. Of award recipients, only three NSP award holders from 52 provided any feedback. Of the 90 respondents (27% response rate) who were award holders of other scheme bursaries, 18% indicated that the award's impact most significantly affected their decision to enter higher education, 12% indicated that the award's most significant impact was on the student's ability to continue beyond their year one studies, with the majority of 70% indicating that the award enabled them to focus on their studies, rather than having to take paid employment. However, 43% of 2012 entrants indicated that the award was, nonetheless, important (43%) or very important (5%) in making their decision to enter higher education. For all 2013 entrants, there has been a year-on-year increase of students who indicated that the availability of an award affected their decision to come to Harper Adams: 23.1% in 2013, 19.5% in 2012, 13% in 2011 and 12% in 2010, which constitutes a nearly doubling in four years. They clearly make a difference to the decisions of a significant minority, although some evidence from the 2012 entry cohort, suggested that a surprisingly large proportion of students find it a challenge to submit an application for an award despite the availability of award schemes being well known. We are in the process of establishing the extent to which the availability of financial support influenced the decisions of those either withdrawing from the 2014 admissions cycle or declining the offer of a place. We shall, accordingly, continue to monitor the impact of our financial support with a view to developing our schemes so that those most in need of scholarship funds will benefit, in a way that is neither burdensome to administer nor to apply for.
40. On the basis of our evaluation thus far, the intention is that, in addition to the 2014/15 NSP scheme, we will also offer a revised bursary scheme for 2014/15 entrants, targeted at those programmes with lower levels of disadvantaged student enrolments than others at Harper Adams. These programmes also provide exceptional employment opportunities, so the scheme will be badged as an 'Access to the Professions Bursary', to highlight the post-course benefits of studying. We shall review its effectiveness before making a decision on whether to extend it to the 2015/16 entry cohort.
41. Likewise, we will wait until we have more evidence of impact on both the 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 entry cohorts of the NSP and our other means-tested awards before making any commitments to longer term bursary schemes, including in relation to the placement year, where most, albeit not all, students are able to earn a reasonable level of income. Whilst we are obliged to charge £1,800 for the placement period, in order to offset some of the costs of supporting students, on to and through, placement, we are concerned about the possible effect of an increased placement fee on those from disadvantaged or under-represented groups, as we do not wish to deter applicants who would benefit from a sandwich course, solely on the basis of perceived affordability. Accordingly, we shall carefully monitor applicant and pre-applicant queries with a view to considering the introduction of additional bursaries for placement fees. We do not yet feel we have robust enough evidence to make this decision,

although we have introduced a survey of in-cycle applicants who withdraw their application or accept a place on a non-sandwich course elsewhere. Thus far, the placement period has not been identified as a deterrent.

42. We are also likely to replace the Access to Learning Fund (ALF) with a Hardship Fund, with similar rules to that applied to the ALF. We have not included that provision as 'OFFA-countable' within our agreement beyond 2014/15, since we will be funding it through the HEFCE Student Opportunity Fund, if that funding stream continues beyond 2014/15.
43. Whilst not within the scope of this access agreement, Harper Adams also invests significant effort into generating scholarship funds through its Development Trust, including through securing industry-sponsored awards, some of which are also linked to placement or employment opportunities. In 2013/14, 107 awards to the value of £275,000 were distributed to students primarily in their first or second year of studies. Whilst these are primarily merit-based awards to students who are already enrolled, under-represented and disadvantaged students benefit from these awards. This serves to demonstrate another way in which our connections with industry benefit our students.
44. We have provided additional staff resources to manage our scholarship schemes, including the National Scholarship Programme for pre-2015/16 entrants and shall continue to do so into the future, with a view to better evaluating their impact to ensure that those most in need benefit from any future schemes.

## **5. Targets and Milestones**

45. In setting targets and milestones, it is important that we consider the mission of Harper Adams in relation to support of the rural economy and the consequent natural catchment of applicants and students from a rural background, from across the United Kingdom. Data compiled by the University show that in 2013/14, 78% of its new entrants were drawn from rural areas, with 54% from a farming background. Whilst the University remains fully committed to attracting students from under-represented groups to study at Harper Adams, our aspirations need to be seen in the context of both the specialist land-based nature of the University's courses and its rural location in Shropshire. Both these factors might, to some extent, militate against our efforts to further widen participation within non-rural communities, although we plan to commit resources towards doing so. The rural dimension is of relevance since the current HESA approach to determining institutions' benchmarks in relation to low participation neighbourhoods and state schooling serves to understate the performance of Harper Adams, as set out in paragraph 14. The targets and milestones are included in the accompanying resource plan, using the approved template. In light of our analysis of POLAR 3 data, aspects of rurality and in-house data relating to our student body, the targets included in the resource plan at Table 7 for state schooled entrants and low participation neighbourhood new enrolments are considered challenging, in the context of our rural catchment, and will be kept under review.

## **6. Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements**

46. The Director of Academic Services & Academic Registrar at the University and the Director of Marketing and Communications, together with other members of the Vice-Chancellor's Management team, have primary responsibility for delivery

of the Access Agreement. Monitoring delivery of the activities set out in the Access Agreement and evaluating progress against the targets and milestones will be undertaken through regular reports to the University Executive and the Board of Governors. The Academic Board of the University will also receive an annual report in the autumn term each year. We intend to review our approach to evaluation when the National Access and Student Success Strategy has been considered in detail, so that we can incorporate best practice ideas from that into our own arrangements and so that we can be confident that our access spending is achieving the results we desire. In the interim period, however, we are investing in software upgrades and increased personnel to support the evaluation of impact of our outreach, student success and financial support activities. We have revised the annual reports that are prepared in relation to enrolment, completion, continuation and achievement and intend to more precisely align reporting to our Board of Governors to highlight the outreach activities planned within this agreement and the targets associated with enrolment and student success. We have taken a more evidence-based, evaluative approach to our considerations in preparing this agreement, including, for example, in relation to proposed revisions to our targets (as paragraphs 13 - 17) and in relation to our financial support (paragraphs 40 - 44). We are continuing to consider the activities outlined in our access agreement alongside those funded through the HEFCE Student Opportunity Fund as these are complementary and, in some instances, overlapping activities, targeted at different student groups.

## **7. Information to Applicants and Students**

47. The University's position on tuition fees and financial support will be clearly set out in a detailed leaflet which we will make available to potential students and their advisers at open days, higher education fairs, school and college visits and other outreach activities. This information will also be prominently displayed on the website of Harper Adams University.
48. A copy of the University's leaflet on tuition fees and financial support will also be sent to all applicants receiving an offer of a place at the University.
49. All applicants seeking admission to a course at Harper Adams University are normally interviewed. During the applicant's interview visit, there will be an opportunity to discuss the extent of the financial support that is likely to be available from the institution.
50. All staff involved in advising students during the recruitment and admissions process, at Harper Adams, will continue to receive briefings on the University's arrangements for tuition fees and scholarships. This will include staff from the Registry, the Marketing and Communications Department, Student Services and Finance, most academic staff as well as senior managers.
51. Information about tuition fees and scholarships will also be made available to both UCAS and Student Finance, in order that students can access this information from the websites of UCAS and Student Finance.

## **8. Consulting with students**

52. A draft of this agreement was shared with the SU Vice-President and the SU executive support to the Vice-President. Intended discussion on the final agreement with other elected student representatives who sit on Academic Board was not possible because of the late release of the agreement template.

Particular attention was given to the balance of available expenditure committed to supporting student success and progression, compared with financial support, and the basis upon which more targeted financial support might best be organised once a clearer evidence base is available.

## **9. Equality and diversity**

53. The University's Single Equality Scheme aims to proactively embed equality in the culture and systems of our organisation by ensuring that policy making, service delivery and employment practice are all equality orientated. A proactive and systematic approach to undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) is in place for existing and new policies. Our Access Agreement has been subject to an EIA, undertaken by a key member of the Equality and Diversity Working Group.
54. The University's Equality and Diversity working group, made up of staff and students from across the institution, has continued its work to support the delivery of our Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan. Our Scheme continues to focus on ensuring that as many as possible of the agreed actions are equally applicable to our policies and procedures for supporting staff and students so that we have a "whole institution" approach to promoting and ensuring equality and diversity.
55. The working group delivered an "equality and diversity week" in 2013 which aimed to raise awareness-amongst staff and students. The group will continue this work in 2014/15 and beyond.
56. We continue to recognise that it can be particularly challenging to ensure that we are able to attract people from a diverse range of backgrounds to work or study in a rural environment that focuses on agriculture and related courses. We have sought advice from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), and were pleased to welcome senior colleagues from there to the University in 2013/14. The ECU has confirmed that the steps we are already taking appear to be appropriate. No further recommendations were made.
57. We continue to take care to monitor our performance against benchmarks for our immediate surrounding counties and for similar rural counties in England. Whilst we remain comparable with these benchmarks, we are not complacent and continue to work hard to encourage people from all backgrounds to consider agriculture, food and related courses as worthwhile options for their own future study and career options. We believe that the activities set out in this agreement will enable us to do so.

This agreement was submitted to OFFA along with the resource plan based on completed templates setting out the following information:

Table 1 - Full-time students: fee limits and student numbers

Table 2 - Part-time courses: Fee limits

Table 3 - Summary student numbers and fee income

Table 4 - Access, student success and progression spend forecasts

Table 5 – Expenditure on financial support

Table 6 – Summary tables (on expenditure)

Table 7a – Statistical targets and milestones relating to applicants, entrants or student body

Table 7b - Other milestones and targets (outreach)