

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY
ACCESS AGREEMENT – 2016 - 2017

1. Introduction and context

1. The mission of Harper Adams University over the 2015-20 period is to provide, 'World leading higher education and research for the delivery of sustainable food chains and rural economies'. Our vision for 2020 is that Harper Adams will be:
 - 'Closely engaged with the industries, professions and organisations that comprise the global agri-food chain and the UK rural economy to deliver a high quality and inclusive learning environment that enhances personal development and employability;
 - A recognised centre of research excellence, especially in the application of science and technological advances and;
 - A trusted source of independent and authoritative commentary to inform public and policy debate on agri-food, animal welfare, land, environmental and rural business matters.'
2. At the time of writing, the University has about 2,465 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.
3. Our experience of working with mature learners, in support of their career aspirations, is that many wish to study part-time, on unregulated and / or very low volume levels of learning that fall outside of OFFA's remit. We consider our record to be very good in this regard but it is not recognised within our access agreement. 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 is currently on 'other undergraduate' programmes of study, including through discrete modules and short awards of no more than 60 credits. Nonetheless, this area of the University's activity reaches out to a distinct and more diverse profile of learners, with higher levels of mature students (94%), state schooling (98%) and lower levels of learners from rural backgrounds (6%) 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 seen a large reduction in part-time enrolments at undergraduate level because of the revised funding arrangements in the future.
4. Since the 2012/13 entry cohort, both further education college partnerships are run as validation, rather than franchising, arrangements. 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

5. The University has agreed the following annual tuition fee rates for UK and EU new entrants joining full time/sandwich undergraduate programmes in 2016/17.

Programmes at Harper Adams University

	Full-time	Part-time
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

6. The fee rates for new entrants in 2016/17 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 low numbers of 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 2016/17, such as a top-up from an Extended Foundation Degree to an Honours Degree programme.
7. It is likely that tuition fee levels for 2016/17 entrants will be increased each year in line with inflationary increases permitted by the government.
8. Virtually all students studying at Harper Adams on an undergraduate programme complete a placement year. Students who commence a Foundation Degree programme in 2016/17, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2017/18. Students who commence an Honours Degree in 2016/17, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2018/19. Students studying during their sandwich year will be subject to a fee of £1,800, based on their year of entry, not on the year in which they undertake the placement period. Accordingly, the average fee, before fee waivers, for most Honours Degree students, over four years, is £7,200 per annum and the average fee for most Foundation Degree students, over three years, is £6,600 per annum.
9. We anticipate that about 660 new full-time home/EU students will join the first year of first Honours Degree, Foundation Degree and Extended Foundation Degree programmes at Harper Adams University in 2016/17, although this clearly depends on the combined effects of an uncapped market and potential students' and other institutions' responses to a more competitive environment, including in relation to a demographic downturn in 18-19 year olds, which is forecast to be more acute in rural counties. We anticipate that 40 students (10-15 FTE) will also be enrolled on fee-regulated part-time courses at Harper Adams, including those who are part-sponsored by employers. All other part-time students will be on unregulated courses.
10. The associated resource plan, prepared in line with the approved template indicates the estimated numbers of full-time students at each fee level and our estimated fee income above the basic level for full-time and part-time courses. We do not anticipate that any part-time students on regulated courses will be charged more than £4,500 a year, as a combined consequence of their study loads and FTE course fee level.

3. Expenditure on additional access and retention measures

11. In setting out our commitments to widen access and support student success, it must be recognised 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. 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 14-17) and affordability. If either the rate of teaching grant or maximum tuition fee declines, we will have to review the commitments herein.

12. Whilst we are not permitted to charge more than £1,800 for the placement year, 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).
13. 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 2019-20, 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 2016/17: countable access spend of £398k; student success spend of £360k; progression spend of £210k; and financial support of £118k; forecast total to be £1.09m which is around 19.4% of tuition income above the basic fee level for the 2016/17 cohort.

Assessing our access record

14. In 2014/15, 69% of our home / EU full-time undergraduate population falls 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.
15. Our land-based specialism results in a predominantly rural, national catchment. Typically, around 81% of our new entrants are from a rural background. This affects: (1) our ability to attract students from low participation neighbourhoods, as low participation neighbourhoods are overwhelmingly urban, and also; (2) reflects how remote, rural inhabitants are more likely to attend boarding schools, which are predominantly independent of the state sector. This distorts our performance indicators related to state schooling and LPN, and is a consequence of our rural catchment, in line with our institutional mission. Most mature students study with us on a part-time basis on programmes which are outside the scope of this agreement. We have, therefore, re-focused our access targets so that they take better account of our mission and associated catchment, as well as a whole student life cycle approach, in relation to relative levels of on-course success and post-course progression. In relation to the targets that we have outlined in Table 7 of the resource plan:

- a. The proportion of all full time undergraduate students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance in 2013/14 has increased to 18.8% from 15.7% in 2009/10, and in excess of the benchmark of 9.1% (HESA Table T7). It constitutes the eighth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution. With revisions to the Disabled Students' Allowance, we intend to utilise an alternate measure of disability, as set out in Table 7 of the resource plan. We anticipate that, from 2016-17 onwards, few disabled students will benefit from applying for the allowance, as the significant costs associated with supporting disabled students are transferred to institutions. We consider that maintaining levels of access by disabled students at 19% will be very challenging, based on the concerns we have heard from disabled applicants concerned about the changes to funded support.
- b. The proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 was at 46.5% in 2013/14, against our benchmark of 39.6% (HESA Table T1a). This represents the nineteenth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution and the third highest statistically significant 'over-performance' on the benchmark. We aim for an enrolment rate of 49% for all new entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 by 2019/20.
- c. Despite high levels of disadvantage or under-representation, based on OFFA criteria, the proportion of young full time first degree entrants who remained in HE in 2013/14 after one year of study in 2012/13, was improved at 95.5% (HESA Table T3a), modestly above the baseline figure of 94.8%, and around our benchmark indicator at 95.4%. We are concerned to ensure that all students, whatever their background, are as likely as others to meet their potential and succeed in their first year studies. For example, mature students had a lower success rate at 91.5% and, whilst above the sector mean (88.1%) and benchmark (89.3%), we aspire for all student groups to be within three percentage points of the mean for the cohort. Accordingly, in working to improve overall continuation rates, we shall monitor the first year success rates of identified 'at risk groups', as set out in paragraphs 28-32 and target support to identified 'at risk' individuals.
- d. Of particular concern to us is the proportion of other undergraduates who do not continue in HE beyond their first year of study. We have improved our performance, increasing to 88.4 % for the 2012/13 entry (from 87.5% for the 2011/12 entry and from 84.2% for the 2010/11 entry), and have modestly exceeded our benchmark for this student group (at 87.4%, as per HESA Table 3d). We intend to continue to work hard to support this group of students, many of whom enter with a BTEC qualification or who have a disability and for whom we have bespoke support arrangements in place. As this group constitutes a larger proportion of our overall cohort (32% in 2013/14, as opposed to a sector mean of 'other undergraduates' of only 6%), it is particularly important that we support all to succeed, as set out in paragraphs 28-32.
- e. The entrant profile and retention data should be considered alongside leavers' destinations. 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 HESA benchmarks of 93.2% for 2012 completers and 92.9% for those completing in 2013 and at 96% for those completing in 2014. We intend to monitor relative achievement of under-represented groups, so that we are able to identify at risk individuals and offer them targeted support should they wish to take it. This is reflected in the work outlined in paragraphs 33-37.

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. 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. 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 yielding results. We have invested in additional student data analysis and planning capacity which has assisted 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 28-32 below, and the milestones and targets 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 4-7, 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 the 2012, 2013 and 2013 new entrant cohorts, we have calculated that 68-70% 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 actively looks to work with industry-led organisations that are engaging with young people to raise their career aspirations. For example, we are working with Bright Crop, which provides mentors nationally to promote careers in agri-food and the land based sectors. Most recently we have begun working with Edge, an industry based organisation in the East of England that is promoting land based careers

to young people. These are long term relationships and we constantly seek out other relationships of this type.

21. Collaborative working with other universities has become an increasing part of our work over the last 18 months and will continue to do so. The Explore University network, established in 2014 with Keele, Wolverhampton and Staffordshire universities, is now successfully delivering a range of activities to years 5 and 6 in eight primary schools across the regions, all of which have a high percentage of free school meals. We plan to continue this work.
22. Partnership working has now been expanded to take in the development of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) initiative. The Explore University partnership has been expanded to become an NNCO and has added secondary schools to its remit. In addition, the university has become a member of the Higher Horizons NNCO. Between the two networks, we are now actively engaging with pupils from under-represented groups across the Midlands, parts of the North and Herefordshire. The work to establish both networks has been mindful of the need for them to be self-sustaining beyond the two years of funding. We are using the initial funding to enable us to add to the provision of the networks as a whole and to build a long-term legacy. We recognise that the potential for Harper Adams to attract students from urban environments is small. Nonetheless, we feel we have a responsibility to contribute to the work of the sector as a whole, in making both the rural and urban pupil populations aware of the breadth of opportunities available at university, including those at specialist institutions.
23. We are keen to build evaluation and feedback over the long term in to the design of all of our activities to enable us to measure impact in the short, medium and long term. With the Explore University initiative, all pupils sign up to the programmes we run and this information is held on a central database by Wolverhampton University, on behalf of the network. The aim is then to track those individual pupils through primary school, into secondary and then through to post-18 education. We are currently investigating the option of utilising the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) tool. The Explore University network is discussing the options for adopting HEAT across the partners. It is hoped to trial HEAT via this network in order to assess its potential for adoption by the university in the longer term.
24. We have begun developing online resources for teachers for them to use with pupils from urban areas who might not otherwise have thought of study in the employment areas we serve, with the first item going live on the Times Educational Supplement website in December 2014. This was a successful trial, so we are now working with industry partners to try and secure funding to enable this project to move forward in the longer term.
25. In 2013/14, we launched a Young Innovator of the Year competition aimed at raising interest in and awareness of engineering as a career and, in particular, with a view to attract more girls to this area of study and work. The target was 200 entries, whilst we received over 1,000. This completion is running again in 2014/15 and, if as successful as in 2013/14, will continue. We offer support to shortlisted entrants, who find cost a barrier to attending the prize-giving ceremony.
26. 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 proactively 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).
- 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.

27. 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 a range of employers. For example, in addition to the Bright Crop Initiative and the JCB Academy work, we are working with the Worshipful Company of Butchers to run hands-on food processing workshops for school children. Our Animals Production, Welfare and Veterinary Sciences department is working with the Birmingham City Council, by contributing to the 'Animal Magic' in-school programme in deprived areas of Birmingham. Our Engineering department has long-established links 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.

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

28. 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 a specialist team 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 includes specialist assistance to those 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. With better data on 'at risk' groups, this team will be able to target those individual students who might benefit from the support of this team.

29. 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. 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. We intend to use internal data to identify individual students from groups who have been at higher risk of leaving early, with a view to offer targeted social and financial support and guidance.

30. We operate a non-selective admissions policy for our 'other undergraduate awards' (which is the Foundation Degree in our context) and have experienced particular difficulties with the preparedness for higher education of new entrants whose entry qualification is a BTEC award. We anticipate higher numbers of new entrants entering with these qualifications in the future, in line with UCAS / Department of Education forecasts (whereby in 2017, the numbers of BTEC holders will be at 140% of the number

in 2012, the number holding both A levels and BTECs at 110% of 2012 levels and whilst the number holding A levels only will be at 95% of the 2012 levels). Analysis of our BTEC entrants' characteristics is that they are more likely to be from an under-represented group than A level entrants (specifically, in relation to a greater likelihood of being a disabled, mature or LPN entrant). Accordingly, we will continue to develop our pre- and on-programme of work, whereby a small team of Academic Guidance Tutors work closely with Senior Tutors to provide targeted support to BTEC entrants in their first year of study.

31. We have invested 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. In 2014, we created a new post of Student Data and Planning Analyst, which has increased 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.
32. 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 assessment to date is that other factors such as age on entry, disability 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

33. 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.
34. 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 (paragraph 31), 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.

35. We are also committed to better understanding the career outcomes of students on the basis of their characteristics, including in relation to professional and managerial employment and starting salaries. Where we identify that particular groups are not achieving their potential at the same rate as others, we will identify 'at risk' students and offer targeted support, in a similar way that we plan to organise advice and mentoring support for academic and social success. We shall organise this advice and mentoring support through the Careers Advisory Service and Placement Office and are considering the benefits of joining the National Mentoring Service. We have also commenced a programme of work to highlight to undergraduate students the benefits that postgraduate study might confer on them, in both employment outcomes and in relation to personal development and plan to continue with this, including through some financial incentives (although not OFFA-countable).
36. Our Careers Service provides group and individualised support to students and recent alumni, working with our excellent network of employers, to help ensure that our graduates are not only successful in their studies but also in employment. We have extended 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. We have also participated in the HEFCE Taught Postgraduate Support Scheme and will offer three bursaries in 2015/16 for students who paid higher fees. These will almost certainly be awarded to alumnus from other universities (as our 2012 entry Honours students are on four year programmes).

Financial support to students who enter in 2016/17

38. As set out in our 2015/16 access agreement, we have no plans to offer solely means-tested bursaries or fee waivers beyond those offered to the 2014/15 entry cohort. We remain unconvinced that such activity has either improved access to higher education or student success outcomes significantly enough to justify the cost, although will continue to review available evidence. On the basis of our experience in 2014/15, in managing our hardship fund, we do have increased concerns about the financial health of middle income students, who are not eligible for maintenance nor significant maintenance loans. We, therefore, plan to extend the hardship fund in 2015/16 and will continue to monitor the demand for such in planning for 2016/17. Accordingly, the 2016/17 agreement includes additional provision for a hardship fund in 2015/16, which was not in the 2015/16 agreement but does not make commitment beyond 2015/16.
39. 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 2014/15, 109 awards to the value of £290,000 were distributed to students primarily in their 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.

5. Targets and Milestones

40. The targets included in the resource plan at Table 7 match our ambitions to continue to support access for disabled students and those from NS-SEC 4-7, whilst also ensuring that all students, whatever their personal characteristics, have the best possible opportunities to succeed on-course and in progressing to either employment or further study. The access and success targets for disabled students are likely to present the University with particular challenges in light of the overhaul of the Disabled Students' Allowance. Anticipated increases in the proportions of BTEC entrants will also result in the need to give special attention to support and curriculum arrangements, so that students have every chance of success and this is reflected in the targets in Table 7. Work to ensure that all students, whatever their personal characteristics, have every opportunity to progress into either employment or further study, is also reflected in the targets in Table 7.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

41. 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. As a small and specialist University, the work set out in this agreement is incorporated into the activities of 'mainstream' functions and departments and, accordingly, constitutes a 'whole institution approach', as there is no dedicated team that solely progresses our ambitions to promote access, success and progression for all student groups. 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 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. The creation of a new post of Student Data and Planning Analyst has increased our capacity for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of our activities, so that resources can be directed to maximise impact.

7. Information to Applicants and Students

42. 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.
43. All applicants seeking admission to a course at Harper Adams University are normally invited to the campus and this provides an opportunity for students to ask questions of the Student Financial Support Officer. 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.
44. 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.

45. 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

46. A draft of this agreement was shared and discussed with the SU President and the SU Support Officer. Discussion on the final agreement with the other elected student representatives who sit on Academic Board was not possible in person because of the timing of the board meeting and the submission deadline of the agreement, although all student representatives were given an opportunity to comment on the final draft.

9. Equality and diversity

47. 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.

48. 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.

49. A number of activities that foster better awareness amongst the University community of equality and diversity issues have taken place during the year, including a continuation of training and development for staff focusing on how to support those who may have on-going or temporary mental health needs. Training in interview techniques has also been delivered, which is important as virtually all undergraduates are invited to the campus to meet with staff and students and participate in an interview. As in previous years, all new staff are required to take and pass an on-line training package relating to equality and diversity as a key element of their induction programme.

50. 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.

51. 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