

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY
ACCESS AGREEMENT – 2017 - 2018

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 2,681 undergraduate students actively studying on predominantly full-time sandwich programmes, of whom about 89% are home / EU students. First degree and Foundation Degree programmes are offered at the University's rural campus, based on a working estate, near Newport in Shropshire. There are, at time of writing, approximately a further 1,967 part-time students engaged in low volume, workforce development programmes, many of which are delivered, at least in part, offsite. Part-time students on workforce development programmes are forecast to be around 2,800 by the completion of the 2015/16 academic year.
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 at 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. 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 (92%) and state schooling (98%). 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 on to Certificate of Higher Education provision because of the revised funding arrangements, despite the curricula being delivered to take account of workplace needs.
4. 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 to reserve the right to charge the maximum fee permissible for UK and eligible EU new entrants joining full time/sandwich undergraduate programmes in 2017/18, as shown in Table 1. This fee, which includes an inflationary uplift of the fees charged in 2016/17, will probably be charged if the University is permitted to charge the higher fee, although reserves the right to charge the lower fee level, even if permitted to charge at the higher level. The final decision on the fee level to charge in 2017/18 will be determined in April 2017, once the outcomes of the Teaching Excellence Framework assessment are known.

Table 1 Undergraduate Programme Fees at Harper Adams University

	Full-time	Part-time
All first degree (BSc/BEng/MEng/MSci) programmes, campus-based studies	£9,250	£6,935
All full-time Foundation Degree courses, including extended Foundation Degree programmes, campus-based studies	£9,250	£6,935
One year full-time sandwich placement year	£1,850	£1,850

6. 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 Tables 1 and 2 in the accompanying resource plan represent the maximum that will be charged and might be lower than this.
7. It is likely that tuition fee levels for 2017/18 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 2017/18, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2018/19. Students who commence an Honours Degree in 2017/18, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2019/20. Students studying during their sandwich year will be subject to a fee of £1,850, 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, will be £7,400 per annum and the average fee for most Foundation Degree students, over three years, will be £6,783 per annum.
9. We anticipate that about 700 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 2017/18, although this clearly depends on the combined effects of uncapped market with higher numbers of alternative providers, growth ambitions of established providers in an uncapped market, and applicants' and other institutions' responses to a more competitive environment, including in relation to the continuing demographic downturn in 18-19 year olds, which is forecast to be more acute in rural counties.
10. We anticipate that 36 students (10-15 FTEs) will also be enrolled on fee-regulated, part-time courses at Harper Adams, including those who are part-sponsored by employers. The vast majority of part-time students will be on unregulated courses which are unrecognised in this agreement, even though this provision directly supports the career and study aspirations of many who would not otherwise experience higher education. We are currently working with another local university to develop a specialist food engineering higher level apprenticeship programme, which will incorporate a part-time, Foundation Degree, including work-based study. This will augment our current regulated programme provision and will, almost certainly, be attractive to those from under-represented groups who do not want to commit to full-time study.
11. The associated resource plan, prepared in line with the approved template indicates the estimated numbers of full-time students at the highest fee level we could charge 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 actually 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

12. 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. 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 paid before 2012/13. 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 has declined over time as a result of a combination of these factors, to a steady state of around 24% by 2020-21, in line with our assessment of our access record (paragraphs 15-19) and affordability. If either the rate of teaching grant or maximum tuition fee declines, we will have to review the commitments herein.
13. Whilst we are not permitted to charge more than £1,850 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).
14. The expenditure set out in this agreement means that we estimate we will make an indicative investment of around £1.5m per annum (estimated at around 24% of fee income, above the basic level, in steady state by 2020-21, following the cessation of the National Scholarship Programme) on financial support, outreach, student success and progression, in order to inspire, 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 'OFFA-countability' and affordability of some activities outlined in this agreement are also unpredictable because of the uncertainty over future levels of funding associated with the HEFCE Student Opportunity Fund (SOF). Notwithstanding these uncertainties, the indicative forecast institutional summary spend is as follows for 2017/18: countable access spend of £364k; student success spend of £458k; progression spend of £304k; and financial support of £268k; forecast total to be £1.4m which is around 23.6% of tuition income above the basic fee level, forecast for the 2017/18 cohort, assuming fees are inflated.

Assessing our access record

15. In 2015/16, 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 over two-thirds of our students facing one sort of challenge or another associated with either disadvantage or under-representation in higher education.
16. Our land-based specialism results in a predominantly rural, national catchment. Typically, around 83% of our new entrants are from a rural background, compared with 19% of the population according to the 2011 census. 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 unregulated programmes which are outside the scope of this agreement. Our access targets, therefore, take 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 2014/15 increased to 18.7% from 15.7% in 2009/10, and in excess of the benchmark of 9.2% (HESA Table T7). It constitutes the eighth highest proportion of any English 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 2017-18 onwards, fewer 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 46.8% in 2014/15, against our benchmark of 39.5% (HESA Table T1b). 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. Although HESA will no longer be publishing this indicator from 2016/17 onwards, we will continue to monitor our own performance on this benchmark, in order to evaluate its reliability as an indicator when compared with the alternative access measure(s) we will adopt. Paragraph 17 outlines our early assessment of whether there are alternative measures that are applicable to our rural context.
- 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 2014/15 after one year of study in 2013/14, was 94.5% (HESA Table T3a), which was above our benchmark indicator at 93.5%. We are, nonetheless, 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, our small cohort of mature students on regulated courses had a lower success rate at 78.3%, which was below the sector mean (84.1%) and our benchmark (85.8%). We aspire for all student groups to be within three percentage points of the mean for the whole 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 36-41 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. Our continuation rate at 82.1% has worsened for the 2013/14 entry cohort (from 88.4% for the 2012/13 entry, 87.5% for the 2011/12 entry, and 84.2% for the 2010/11 entry), and we are now behind our benchmark for this student group (at 87.7%, 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 'other undergraduate' group constitutes a larger proportion of our overall cohort (22% in 2013/14, as opposed to a sector mean of 'other undergraduates' of only 4%), it is particularly important that we support all to succeed, as set out in paragraphs 36-41. Our work in 2014/15 has already yielded improvements on this measure which will be evident when the HESA 2015/16 non-continuation indicators are published in Spring 2017. We remain committed to support this work and intend to extend the academic guidance tutoring team capacity in order to do so, given the forecast increase in the overall student population and, specifically, the forecast increase in vocationally qualified entrants who we know tend to struggle in their acclimatisation to higher education.

- e. The entrant profile and retention data should be considered alongside leavers' destinations. Our graduates have consistently been within the top twenty most successful of all UK higher education institutions at securing employment, with 96% in employment or further study within six months of completing in 2014, and 96.2% in both 2012 and in 2013, against HESA benchmarks of 93.7% in 2014, 92.9% in 2013 and 93.2% for 2012 completers. Internal data indicates that the 2015 graduating cohort achieved a rate of 99%.
- f. We intend to monitor relative success and progression 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 36-41 and in the ambitions in Table 7 of the accompanying resource plan.

17. We have considered the experimental access indicators that have recently been proposed by the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group as alternatives to the SEC IV-VII indicator. The first indicator relating to Free School Meals is another indicator, alongside LPN and state schooling, which fails to take into account the rural dimension of UK communities and is inappropriate for our context. The Commission for Rural Communities, which had been established to tackle rural disadvantage because it is overlooked by virtually all mainstream policy bodies and commentators, evidenced in its report, *State of the countryside update: children and educational services* (2010), that children living in rural poverty were 30% less likely to access free school meals than those living in urban poverty. Household incomes in rural communities, particularly those in farming communities, are extremely volatile, due to the price inelasticity of demand for primary agricultural outputs and associated price fluctuations. We are, therefore, hesitant to adopt this second indicator on a trend basis, because it is subject to distortion by global weather and associated production outputs. EU membership adds a further dimension of uncertainty to this measure for household income in farming communities. Insufficient detail on the nature of the proposed third 'school type' indicator means this will require more consideration by us, taking into account any rural dimensions once we have more information. Accordingly, our initial thoughts are that a fourth proposed indicator (based on new entrants' previous institutions' leavers' progression rates into Higher Education) is probably best suited to represent our efforts to widen access over the medium term. We will review, and possibly revise, this indicative commitment with experience. Table 7 of the resource plan reflects this indicative commitment, based on available internal and external data.

18. Overall, 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.

19. 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 36-41 below, and the milestones and targets set out at Table 7 in the resource plan.

4. Access Measures

Pre-applicant outreach activity

20. 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 15-17. 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 2014 new entrant cohorts, we have calculated that 68-72% 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.

21. 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).

22. 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.

23. We are also taking the lead, in partnership with Bright Crop, in developing resources for all education providers and employers to talk to young people with a common narrative and voice about training and careers in the food and farming sectors. This is a market leading piece of work aimed at improving accessibility to non-traditional students. The

resources being developed will be hosted on the University website and made freely available to all with an interest in attracting young people to the sector. To complement this work, we are at the early stages of planning a programme of work experience opportunities for those who might not have sufficient social networks or capital to do secure their own. We hope that this will inspire individuals and provide them with the necessary motivation and experience to embark on HE studies in our specialist areas.

24. 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 as we look to extend the proportion of entrants who come from urban backgrounds.
25. Partnership working was expanded to take in the development of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) initiative. The university became a member of the Higher Horizons NNCO covering mainly the North Midlands area. This network has been very successful with all current targets being met or exceeded. Higher Horizons is a collaborative network of university and FE college partners, working together to support schools with outreach activities to help broaden the horizons of young learners into further and higher education. It currently represents 12 HE and FE partners and supports a network of 171 state funded secondary schools across the North West and Midlands region. We plan to maintain our involvement in the network. Membership of Higher Horizons allows Harper Adams to be represented by the co-funded central members of staff, working on behalf of all partners in the network, at a number of activities targeting low HE transitional areas. This includes collaborative information, advice and guidance (IAG) stands at a number of HE fairs, and Parents & Careers evenings, the delivery of impartial IAG sessions in schools and colleges around themes such as student finance and management of a robust localised learner focused IAG website. In addition, Harper Adams has committed to contribute to at least two Year 10 collaborative conferences and two 'Looked after Children' events per annum, through the network. We have also populated a central collaborative website (higherhorizons.co.uk) with institutional IAG and curriculum based outreach sessions that the network's partner schools can access for delivery by Harper Adams, brokered through, and evaluated by, the central network. Being a part of the network also gives members an improved ability to do more specifically targeted activity to go some way towards meeting the Government's goals around increased transition to HE of BME young people and 'white, working class boys'. Whilst Harper Adams has an excellent record on 'white, working class boys', the network provides access to those from urban, as opposed to, rural backgrounds, and a means to introduce them to the opportunities that a career in the land-based or rural professions might provide.
26. Further, following the announcement of funding for the special initiative National Outreach Programme, it is the intention of the Higher Horizons consortium to work together to bid collaboratively for funding. The aim will be to enable the development of new and complimentary activity which specifically targets the priority groups identified by this initiative with the intention of making a major contribution to the Government participation targets for 2020. Given the success of this consortium to date, it is strongly placed to expand targeted activity quickly, efficiently and productively.
27. The Explore University network was developed into an NNCO to expand its remit from solely primary school outreach work to also include secondary level aspiration raising. Its geographical coverage complimented the Higher Horizons network covering the southern edge of the latter's remit. This network has been slower to make progress, and consideration is currently being given to merging the two networks to enable sustainability beyond the HEFCE funding. There is a definite desire by all the universities involved to build on the successes of the two networks so far. Although the smallest

university partner in both networks, Harper Adams has been a very active and fully committed contributor to both collaborations.

28. 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 to track those participating individual pupils through primary school, into secondary and then through to post-18 education. We are currently investigating the option of utilising tools such as the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) tool on a sole institution basis; regrettably the flat charging structure makes affordability a major issue for a small institution, and is one that is being progressed by Guild HE. We are hopeful that this issue will be resolved so that we are able to evaluate all our outreach activities in relation to progression rates beyond Harper Adams, not only that which is undertaken within networks, as is currently the case.
29. 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 attracting more females to this area of study and work. The target was 200 entries, so we were pleased to receive over 1,000. This competition is now in its third year and continues to be providing an innovative way of broadening the reach of the university to urban schools. In particular it is providing support to teachers in encouraging interest in engineering with a broader range of pupils.
30. The following examples illustrate 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:-
 - Continued working with the JCB Academy autumn event focusing 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. University staff also get involved in delivering STEM events.
 - 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, in order to engage the under-14 age group, particularly at primary age, and raise their basic awareness of career opportunities in the land-based sectors. Last year we introduced a food based activity at these shows – the Bug Eating Challenge - which

significantly raised footfall and which, in particular, attracted school groups to visit the stand. In March 2016, this initiative won *The Guardian* University Awards category for best communications campaign.

- 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 engaged with.
- Developing our student ambassador training to increase their awareness of the need to widen participation and to help them develop the skills required 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. This campaign is now entering its fourth year.
- 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). These are now particularly highlighted in our careers publication, called '3.7m', and on the related careers website www.3point7m.com.
- 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 or young care givers who are invited to attend for an interview.
- Actively participating 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 natural rural catchment. In 2016 we are extending the Bug Eating Challenge to the major city-based UCAS fairs to raise awareness of the challenges of feeding the world and introducing the idea of being a part of this quest to a wider non-traditional market.
- There are four military bases within the local area of the university. In 2015, we engaged directly with three schools in the catchment of these bases and a similar level of engagement is planned in 2016/17, as we understand that the children of military families can face particular barriers in their educational attainment.
- 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, across the calendar year.
- 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, obtaining feedback on ways of better reaching students from under-represented groups.
- Our approach to supporting students post-application has recently been shortlisted in the category for Outstanding Admissions Team in the 2016 Times Higher Education Leadership & Management Awards, reflecting the high standards that we maintain in our applications process.

31. The last twelve months saw the development of a new partnership with the Smallpiece Trust. This is a charity which specialises in encouraging young people into careers in engineering. In particular they reach out to talented young people from urban areas. Although not specifically 'WP' focused, the very nature of where they recruit from means that they do communicate to a very broad demographic. Last year over 70 pupils participated in the programme on campus and in 2016 around 60 are expected to attend.
32. A new initiative being trialled in 2016 is 'Harper Adams Means Business'. This is a programme targeted at year 12 pupils aiming to introduce them to the idea of business related careers in the food and farming sectors. The programme is being promoted to a range of schools, although local schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged and under-represented students are being targeted.
33. In April 2016, the university hosted the first ever Youth Entomology Conference. Around 200 young people attended and 129 were from schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils. We were pleased to receive extensive TV coverage for this initiative, which we hope will inspire young people to study this specialist subject area.
34. Each year the university hosts a number of pupils undertaking work experience. To date in 2016, we have hosted 18 pupils registered for work experience, of whom 15 are from schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils.
35. From 2016/17 onwards, we anticipate that new undergraduate courses in mechanical engineering and geography will be more attractive than some of the more heavily land-based programmes for which we are renowned, to applicants from urban backgrounds who wish to study in a rural location. These new undergraduate curriculum areas, alongside the development of the engineering apprenticeship programme, should go some way to further diversifying our student base. The development of a work experience programme should also support more entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds to meet the entry qualifications for our highly vocational and professionally oriented programmes.

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

36. 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. These tutors 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 achievement data on 'at risk' groups, this team, in conjunction with Senior Tutors and other Student Services staff (in relation to, for example, mental health and wellbeing guidance, counselling, accommodation or financial planning) has been able to target those individual students who might benefit from support, starting from when they arrive at the University. The impact of this initiative will be evaluated to determine whether we need to maintain, extend or revise our approach.
37. 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 substantive posts, in addition to placement counsellors, 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 has been extended further and has, undoubtedly, enabled a number of students to continue with their studies, despite significant mental health problems. We are investing in online 'triaging' support which should enable the work of the counselling and mental health specialists to focus on those students in most need of one-to-one, 'face-time', support. 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. Our use of 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 will be evaluated to ensure we make best use of the resources at our disposal.

38. We operate an inclusive admissions policy for our 'other undergraduate awards' (which is the Foundation Degree in our context) and we are considered a 'low tariff' institution by UCAS. Students with modest entry qualifications usually need higher levels of support in order to succeed. We have also experienced particular difficulties with the preparedness for higher education of new entrants whose entry qualification is a BTEC award, including with students presenting relatively high UCAS tariff points associated with the higher graded BTEC awards. 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, whilst the number holding A levels only will be at 95% of 2012 levels). Accordingly, we will continue to develop our pre- and on-programme of work, whereby our team of Academic Guidance Tutors work closely with Senior Tutors to provide targeted support to BTEC entrants during pre-entry and in their first year of study. Course management teams are recognising the positive impact of this work as four of the ten undergraduate curriculum areas specifically highlighted the intended greater use of the academic guidance tutoring team to support student success, through their annual monitoring returns and action plans to the Academic Board.
39. In anticipation of the changes to the financial support available to disabled students from 2016/17 onwards, and in order to improve the success chances of all students, including those with other characteristics of disadvantage, the Academic Board has approved policy and guidance for inclusive teaching and assessment practice and curricula design. Notwithstanding this anticipatory work, the migration of the funding responsibility to universities from the Student Loans Company for supporting remaining reasonable adjustments will be challenging for a small institution with high levels of contact time, the need for expensive facilities and resources to support a specialist curriculum and with very high levels of student disability.
40. 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 these activities are appropriately resourced for an institution of this size and available funds. Our most recent assessment is that first year students who took up this sort of support reduced their mean performance gap to zero over the course of the year and, in

Honours programmes, were also more likely to achieve at first of upper second class level.

41. We have a commitment to improve the on-course success rates of all our students, including those who are considered 'OFFA-countable'. Our analysis of student achievement variables confirms that receipt of means-tested financial support has not 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

42. 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.
43. 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 42), 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.
44. We are 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 committed to participating in the National Mentoring Service's programme to work with our small population of black and minority ethnic students, not only to help raise and support the aspirations of these students, but also to learn about ways in which we could do similarly for other groups. 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 financial incentives (although not OFFA-countable) for alumni. As successive graduating cohorts have enjoyed sector-leading employment rates, many of our alumni do not return for postgraduate studies until a few years into their careers, in order to update on specialist aspects of their profession or in order to re-orientate their career path. Relatively few of our first degree leavers go straight into postgraduate studies.

45. 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. The Careers Service has developed a programme called 'Becoming a Professional' in order to raise the aspirations and preparedness of all our leavers to enter professional and managerial positions, where this fits in with their life plans.
46. Although 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, including a very generous award for those who achieve a first class honours degree. 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. Our postgraduate curriculum is organised on week day block delivery which enables students to easily access study at level seven whilst in full-time employment. This mode of delivery is probably at least as helpful in facilitating access to postgraduate studies for under-represented groups as is the provision of financial support, whether the latter is in the form of University support or the new Postgraduate Loan Scheme.

Financial support to students who enter in 2017/18

47. 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 and earlier entry cohorts. We remain unconvinced that such means-tested financial support activity has either improved access to higher education or student success outcomes significantly enough to justify the cost, although we will continue to review available evidence. On the basis of our experiences in 2014/15 and in 2015/16, in managing our hardship fund, we have concerns about the financial health of middle income students, who were not eligible for maintenance grants nor significant maintenance loans. We, therefore, plan to continue offering hardship funds in 2016/17 and will continue to monitor the demand for such, and evaluate their impact, in planning for 2017/18. Accordingly, the 2017/18 agreement includes provision for a hardship fund in 2016/17, but does not make a commitment beyond 2016/17. We have plans to launch a new Full Fees Merit Scholarship solely for those from groups which are under-represented at Harper Adams University. The characteristics are likely to include the following: BME; care leaver; LPN domiciled and also free school meal recipients. We intend to launch six of these Scholarship awards for 2017/18 entrants, which will be heavily promoted in schools and colleges with poor progression rates to higher education. Target schools and colleges will include those that we currently work with and also others that further analysis determines will find our subject mix of interest to their pupils. Our hope is that the availability of six awards, which provide full fee waivers to the value of £9,250 a year (£1,850 during the sandwich year), will inspire pupils from under-represented groups to give serious consideration to Harper Adams University and to work hard to achieve excellent results, to provide a solid basis for higher education studies. We intend to promote these awards for 2017/18 entry and, on the assumption that our evaluation deems that they have been successful in attracting candidates who would not otherwise have considered either Harper Adams University or higher education at all, will continue to offer six awards for successive entry cohorts. If our evaluation determines that the availability of these awards does not enable us to extend our reach into target schools and colleges beyond our existing engagement programme, we will reconsider the Scheme and reflect this in subsequent access agreements. The full details of the Scheme will be researched with a view to publication and promotion in September 2016.

48. Harper Adams also invests significant effort into generating scholarship funds through its Development Trust, predominantly through securing industry-sponsored awards, some of which are also linked to salaried placement or employment opportunities. In 2015/16, 106 awards to the value of £360,000, funded by 70 sponsors, 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 disproportionately from these awards. This serves to demonstrate another way in which our connections with industry benefit our students and links financial support to enabling opportunities which improve personal development and graduate employment opportunities.

5. Targets and Milestones

49. The targets included in the resource plan at Table 7 match our ambitions to continue to support access for disabled students and those from both NS-SEC 4-7 groups and / or those who enter from schools or colleges with poor HE access rates, 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

50. 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 to more precisely align reporting to our Board of Governors on progress against the targets associated with enrolment and student success. The creation of the Student Data and Planning Analyst post 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

51. The University's position on tuition fees will be clearly set out materials 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 in advance of the 2017/18 admissions cycle.

52. 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 information on fees and charges will also be sent to all applicants receiving an offer of a place at the University.

53. 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 non-means tested financial awards. This information includes outline details of the Development Trust awards but because these awards are made whilst students on-course, they cannot be used to 'incentivise' students to enrol at Harper Adams. This will include staff from the Registry, the Marketing and Communications Department, Student Services and Finance, most academic staff as well as senior managers.

8. Consulting with students

54. A draft of this agreement was shared and discussed with the SU President and the SU Manager. Discussion on the final agreement with 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 when it was circulated to all Academic Board members for consideration and endorsement by correspondence.

9. Equality and diversity

55. 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 revised, proactive and systematic approach to undertaking Equality Analyses is in place for existing and new policies. Our Access Agreement has been subject to an Equality Analysis.
56. 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.
57. 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. 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.
58. 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, albeit that we are extending our curriculum coverage so that it might be more appealing to those from urban areas. We have previously sought advice from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) which confirmed that the steps we are already taking appear to be appropriate and made no recommendations for further work. In 2016, we are hosting a representative from Stonewall who will offer advice on supporting equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender staff and students.
59. 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.

60. As with most, if not all, universities, we have been required to support a small number of students who have been the subject of sexual harassment or violence. These incidents have predominantly, although not exclusively, involved female victims. The Student Services team will be reviewing arrangements in support of all those involved, including associated disciplinary procedures where alleged aggressors are also students, in whatever ways are considered most appropriate in our small community setting. We await UUK's review of the Zellick guidance with interest and will reflect this in our arrangements to ensure that all students, whatever their background or personal characteristics, are fairly treated and with compassion. The impacts of alleged sexual violence or harassment are permitted within extant mitigating circumstances arrangements and we believe our record on supporting a small numbers of victims to date has been legally and morally robust.

61. 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