

**HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY
ACCESS AGREEMENT – 2018-2019**

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 2,624 undergraduate students actively studying on predominantly full-time sandwich programmes, of whom about 91% 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 1,534 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 2,231 by the completion of the 2016/17 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 (95%) and state schooling (99%). 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 larger volume Certificate of Higher Education provision because of the revised funding arrangements.
4. The continuing commitment to validating provision at Askham Bryan College with sites in several counties across the North of England constitutes a desire to support the access plans of a selected, specialist land-based Further Education College, and to provide another access route to those who could otherwise be deterred from higher education. As with our considerable part-time, mature cohort, these students are out of scope within this Agreement but are, nonetheless, able to access our curriculum to further their personal development needs in support of their social mobility.

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 currently and in the future for UK and eligible EU new entrants joining full time / sandwich undergraduate programmes in 2018/19. This fee will most likely be in the range of £9,250 to £9,550, depending on the level permitted by the government. The maximum fee for part-time students for most courses will be in the range of £6,935 to £7,165, but could be lower depending on each individual student's study load. The final decision on the fee level to be charged in 2018/19 for 2018/19 (and earlier) entrants will be determined in early Summer of 2017, once the government has confirmed the fee levels for 2018/19. It is likely that tuition fee levels for 2018/19 entrants will be increased in each subsequent year of study in line with any inflationary increases permitted by the government, and as set out in the University's fees and charges statements, which are published to pre-applicants and applicants through webpages and offer letters, in line with consumer contract and protection

regulations. The fees set out in Tables 1 and 2 in the accompanying resource plan represent the currently permitted maximum fee level (£9,250), as required through the template provided by OFFA. Associated expenditure assumes this fee level but would require adjustment if fee levels are permitted to be inflated, on a proportional basis across each of the activity areas.

6. Virtually all full-time students studying at Harper Adams on an undergraduate programme complete a placement year. Students who commence a Foundation Degree programme in 2018/19, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2019/20. Students who commence an Honours Degree in 2018/19, which includes a one year sandwich placement, will normally undertake the sandwich placement in 2020/21. Students studying during their sandwich year will be subject to a fee of £1,850 plus any permitted inflationary increases which are applied in successive years, 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, based on the current permitted maximum fee levels will be £7,400 per annum and the average fee for most Foundation Degree students, over three years, will be £6,783 per annum, plus any permitted inflationary increases.
7. We anticipate that about 650 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 2018/19, although this clearly depends on the combined effects of the 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, alongside the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy which will encourage more students into part-time learning at higher education level, whilst in full-time work.
8. The vast majority of our part-time students study on unregulated courses which are unrecognised in this Agreement, even though this provision directly supports the study, career and social mobility aspirations of many who would not otherwise experience higher education (as paragraphs 2-3) . We also anticipate that around 110 students (around 30 FTEs) will also be enrolled on regulated, part-time courses at Harper Adams, including those mature students who are part-sponsored by employers and who work as veterinary nurses and livestock auctioneers. Most will study at a sufficient volume (a minimum 25% of a full-time study load) to be included within this Agreement, although the flexibility of programmes means this will not be known until the session is nearing its completion. In support of part-time access to higher education, we are developing new programmes that are planned to support in the region of 24 apprentices in 2018/19, who will be studying within a Degree Apprenticeship, specialising in rural estate and land management, towards fulfilment of Rural Chartered Surveyor status. We are also exploring supporting apprenticeship programmes in engineering and in food production which could augment these numbers. These developments will, almost certainly, be attractive to those from under-represented groups or mature students who do not want to commit to full-time study, and even though they are out of scope of this Agreement, they contribute to our work to support social mobility through flexible study options.
9. 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 but this is not known for certain.

3. Expenditure on additional access and retention measures

10. In setting out our commitments to widen access and support student success and progression, 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 primarily established to serve. The proportion of high fee income spent on access agreement activities is planned at a steady state of around 24% by 2021-22, in line with our assessment of our access record (paragraphs 13-16) and affordability. If either the rate of teaching grant or maximum tuition fee declines, we will have to review the commitments herein.
11. Whilst we are not currently 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.
12. The expenditure set out in this agreement means that we estimate we will make an indicative investment of around £1.4m per annum (estimated at around 25% of high fee income, above the basic level, in steady state by 2021-22, 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 in each of these four areas of activity may change over time as we continue to evaluate the impact 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 2018/19: countable access spend of £390k; student success spend of £436k; progression spend of £290k; and financial support of £264k; forecast total to be £1.4m which is around 24% of tuition income above the basic fee level, forecast for the 2018/19 cohort, assuming fees are set at £9,250 for 2018/19 and 2017/18 entrants (and £9,000 for earlier cohorts). The balance of spend takes into account our desire to make a bigger impact in reaching groups of students who would not previously have considered Harper Adams as an attractive proposition because of our subject specialisms and rural location. This agreement sets out how we intend to do so without the need to make a large increase in access expenditure, which would be unaffordable (as explained in paragraph 10). We have made efficiency savings through the reorganisation of our marketing and outreach team. We have planned a more consolidated approach to our outreach plans, alongside the expectation that we will benefit from working alongside newly appointed and co-located colleagues, who form part of a hub of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), but whose costs are not reflected in this Agreement. This synergy will reduce overhead costs for both the NCOP and our own access work. We remain committed to our work to improve student success because, whilst our overall performance in this respect is good, we have identified that there are groups of under-represented students for whom our work needs to make greater impact, so that they achieve at similar levels to other groups (as paragraph 14d). The modest increase in financial support represents a revised approach which is intended to directly support our outreach, aspiration-raising and attainment raising activities. Whilst our evaluation is that modest, means-tested bursaries (whether tuition fee waivers or cash-like) have not impacted on either access or success (either at Harper Adams or elsewhere), we believe that a 100% 'Fees-Free' scholarship is an attractive offer. Early insights gained through our online media tools supports this assessment. Historically, we have found it very difficult to gain access to time with schools, in light of our rural location and our specialist subject base, given that schools have only limited capacity to work with

universities and choose to work with those with a broad-based offer who are within easy travelling distance. We have committed to provide up to six 'Fee-Free' Success Scholarships for applicants who meet postcode, household income and other criteria related to characteristics of under-representation and which we believe will provide a catalyst to spark their interest in the possibility of higher education which leads to a rewarding career in the industries which we serve.

Assessing our access record

13. In 2016/17, 70% of our total home / EU full-time undergraduate population falls into one or more OFFA-countable categories. Seventy four percent of new students in 2016/17 are disadvantaged or under-represented, compared with 73% in 2015/16. We believe that, whilst the majority of our student population is from a rural background, these figure are 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.
14. Our land-based specialism results in a predominantly rural, national catchment. Typically, around 82% 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 neighbourhood background using the POLAR 3 categorisation, 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 2015/16 was 18.2%, in excess of the benchmark of 9.8% (HESA Table T7). It constitutes the sixth 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 2018-19 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. In 2015/16, the University's own internal data shows 21.1% of all home/EU students were disabled.
 - 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 represented the nineteenth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution and the third highest statistically significant 'over-performance' on the benchmark, as has been continuously the case since monitoring was introduced. Forty seven percent of 2015/16 new undergraduate entrants were from SEC classes 4-7. We aim for an enrolment rate of 49% for all new entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 by 2021/22. Although HESA is no longer publishing this indicator, we will continue to monitor our own performance on this benchmark, to evaluate whether our provision continues to support those from lower socio-economic groups, using parental occupation as an indicator. Our 2017/18 Agreement (paragraph 17) proposed an additional access measure from a selection of 'exploratory' indicators that, at the time, the HEFCE PI Steering Group indicated would be more fully developed for use for future Agreements. As this has not happened, we intend, alternately, to adopt a measure based on neighbourhood participation rates, as set out in 14c below.

- c. As an alternative to the exploratory measure of access tentatively proposed in the 2017/18 Agreement, we now intend to work towards increasing the proportion of entrants who come from a neighbourhood which is categorised as POLAR 3 Quintile 1 or Quintile 2 (Q1 or Q2), using all full-time undergraduates entrants in 2016/17 as our baseline. Whilst the nature of our rural curriculum and location focus is not sufficiently captured in the HESA Q1 benchmarking data (ie Tables T1-T2 of the Widening Participation Performance Indicator series), we note that the Q1-Q2 measure is now more widely used in the sector and that this broader indicator of access (ie Q1-Q2, as opposed to solely Q1) includes sufficient rural or semi-rural wards to provide scope for the University to engage in meaningful and affordable outreach activities. Our planned curriculum development and outreach work should enable us to increase the proportions of new entrants from Q1-Q2 over the five year period so that they increase by 1 percentage point in each year, with a baseline of 12% in 2016/17.
- d. Despite high levels of disadvantage or under-representation, based on OFFA criteria (as paragraph 13), the proportion of young full time first degree entrants who remained in HE in 2015/16 after one year of study in 2014/15, was 94.5% (HESA Table T3a), which was above our benchmark indicator at 93%. 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 80.5%, which was below the sector mean (88.7%) and our benchmark (89.9%) (HESA Table T3a), based on the non-continuation of around five students. Interestingly, all those who did not continue had previous HE experience, whereas the success rate for those without previous HE experience was 100%, with zero non-continuation (Table T3c). Nonetheless, 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 53-57 and target support to identified 'at risk' individuals.
- e. Of particular concern to us is the proportion of other undergraduates who do not continue in HE beyond their first year of study. Pleasingly, our continuation rate at 88.0% has improved for the 2014/15 entry cohort (from 81.1% for the 2013/14 entry, 86.9% for the 2012/13 entry, and 86.9% for the 2012/13 entry), and we are now aligned with our benchmark for this student group (at 88.5%, 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 large proportion of our overall cohort (20% in 2015/16), it is particularly important that we support all to succeed, as set out in paragraphs 53-57. Our work has already yielded some improvements on this measure as evidenced in these indicators. We remain committed to support this work.
- f. 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. The 2015 graduating cohort achieved a rate of 99.4%. Internal data suggests that the final rate for the 2016 graduating cohort will be published in the region of 98%.
- g. 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 48-57 and in the ambitions set out in Table 7 of the accompanying resource plan.
15. 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.

16. 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.

4. Access Measures

Pre-applicant outreach activity: A Step Change

17. We are planning a step change in our efforts to support social mobility through our access outreach work. The starting point for this is a re-focusing of our positioning in the HE market. Specifically this is to bring awareness of the Harper Adams' name in line with the reality of the Harper Adams' offer today; still a specialist university but with greater breadth than solely our agricultural origins. We believe this will be the cornerstone of a more consolidated approach to widening participation. A more strategic approach will be taken to pick up on the key themes of improving pre-entry attainment, sparking subject interest, the importance of creating pathways to progression and the particular challenge of white, working class boys. A social mobility strategy has been developed to support these aims which not only gives a framework for developing a more 'joined up', long term approach to our widening participation efforts, but will also help us to build the relationships with a small number of schools so that we can, realistically, within the context of our small scale and subject expertise, work with them to improve attainment.
18. In 20 years Harper Adams has grown from an agricultural college to a specialist University. Agriculture remains its core, but we now provide an expanded range of subjects covering all aspects of the "farm to fork" supply chain, including management of land for production and amenity purposes, food production and processing, engineering, veterinary sciences and sustainable business management. We are engaged with one of the toughest challenges the world faces over the next 30 years; how to feed an additional 2 billion people by 2050. The opportunity for Harper Adams' widening participation ambitions is to map our activity against the background of a growing cultural awareness amongst young people that sustainability of the world's resources, food and the environment is one of the key issues of the world today, even if their understandings of the interconnectedness of food and the environment is currently limited.

Understanding the social mobility challenges in our region

19. The intention in this Access Agreement to take a more comprehensive, longitudinal approach, involving deeper relationships with schools, has implications for the realistic geographical reach of our social mobility work. Pragmatically these relationships will be more easily built, and meaningful, regular interventions (in school and on campus) will be more easily scheduled and implemented, when a school is within a relatively close proximity to the University. This has implications for our key target audience.

White, working class boys

20. The West Midlands widening participation cohort is predominantly composed of the white, working class. The problem of low progression rates from school to HEI's amongst white, working class males is well documented¹.

Whilst there has to be a recognition that the barriers to attainment (and, thus, progression) for this group are complex, ingrained and unlikely to be overcome by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) alone, the predominance of this challenging group in our region, means that they must remain a key target, notwithstanding that our 2016 entry intake constituted 23% white, working class males (in socio-economic classification groups 4-7). *About a Boy* from the National Educational Opportunities Network² (page 3) recommends that: *"The key to address this is the active engagement of schools working in partnership with HE"*. A key feature of Harper Adams' approach is to recognise the challenge, and to build strategic partnerships and programmes of engagement and interventions over time, which address the following:

1. Mentors

We have reviewed our own profile of student ambassadors and have identified that it is less 'working class' and less 'male' than the rest of our student body and will look to address this.

2. Sport

Given our students' success in many sports, particularly rugby and motorsport the potential of using sport as a way of engaging with the white, working class, male audience will be explored.

3. Relevant and accessible subject 'entry points'

On the assumption that there will be certain areas of our offer that spark interest with members of the target group, such as Engineering, which is the 'home' of the Harper Rally Team (a very successful team on the national stage), these aspects of the offer can be utilised more strongly than others within the programme of interventions. For example, the university will be hosting a pan-European Field Robotic Machine Event and programmes of engagement with target schools could involve building and operating their own vehicles, for example.

4. Career and life opportunities

Career opportunities are a key area for focus in widening participation programmes, especially in highlighting the value of HE as a way of advancing and improving circumstances. With our exceptional record of graduate employability, this remains a key theme to be further explored and exploited.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities specific to our specialist subject areas

21. A sound understanding of the broad themes of our subject areas are central to the effort of encouraging under-represented groups to progress to higher education at Harper Adams, so we have reviewed research² into the views of young people concerning food production and the countryside. This key report pointed to growing levels of disengagement from the countryside and a poor level of awareness and understanding of farms, farmers and food production. Most interestingly: *"Among those living in rural areas, only one in three consider themselves to be residents of the countryside (32%). Insight from the discussion groups illustrates that young children who live in rural communities do not necessarily consider themselves to be countryside residents, with many remaining uncertain about where the boundaries of the countryside lie"* (page 38).

¹Webster, M. & Atherton, G. 2016. *About a Boy: The challenges in widening access to higher education for white males from disadvantaged backgrounds* National Education Opportunities Network. Available online at:

² Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and Farming and Countryside Education (FACE). 2011. *Benchmarking the views of children aged 7-15, on food, farming and countryside issues*. Norwich: Childwise. Available online: http://www.ahdb.org.uk/projects/documents/FACE-AHDBResearch2011Quantitative_Report.pdf [accessed 12th April 2017]

22. Another piece of research, a report by the RSPB in 2016, led to a headline in *The Guardian*³, “Four out of 5 UK children ‘not connected to nature’”. Whilst more research needs to be done in this area, both these pieces of research point not just to issues around declining understanding, interest and engagement with our core subject matter amongst children overall, but also the key insight that some of the biggest challenges are actually in rural rather than urban areas.

Key educational themes

23. This research gives a blueprint for the theme of various types of intervention that will inform our widening participation strategy and its implementation, as follows.

1. Both pieces of research indicate **the crucial role of visits to the countryside and farms**, in particular, to enhance a student’s understanding of food production. This will form a key part of work through the provision of educational visits and residential stays.
2. A key theme of education around food is **the growing of food in schools** themselves. The positive educational impact of food growing as an activity within schools is well noted⁴, although, this research again highlights the discrepancy that schools in urban areas are more likely to participate in food growing activities than those in rural areas.
3. **Understanding the Food Chain.** The AHDB/FACE report points to the lack of understanding of the food chain and the interconnected system of processes that goes into putting food on our tables. In response to this, we will develop programmes of interventions and educational tools to inspire, engage and raise awareness of the food chain.
4. **Tackling the stereotypes.** Again, the AHDB/FACE report points to significant stereotypes around the farmer and food production. In response to this, we intend to develop a series of educational interventions, in schools and on campus, to inspire, engage and raise awareness of the reality of farming, food production and the careers within the sector.

Addressing these Challenges

24. We are aware of our strategic positioning and opportunities and, alongside this, we are also committed to tackling the challenges. To do so the university will take a strategic approach to a longitudinal programme of intervention, the overall aim being that the provision and activities will raise aspirations and opportunities amongst our target areas. The programme of intervention will look at a high-level format of intervention, alongside key conventional routes such as providing time and resource to work with schools and colleges around Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). The focus will be across several schools and cohorts to identify correlations to attainment. We are working to develop a programme that will address the needs of white, working class boys, by concentrating on our specialisms through providing a diverse range of activity around food sustainability, applied engineering and land based study and associated employment opportunities.

25. There will be focus on both urban and rural based schools based on current research. We are keen to ensure that the outreach activities are offered to students from a wide range of backgrounds within schools across many wards, across all quintiles, although with a particular emphasis on higher levels of engagement with quintiles 1-3. This intention should enable us to increase the proportion of new entrants from POLAR 3 quintiles 1-2.

Understanding Barriers to Entry at Harper Adams University

26. We have considered three years’ of application and admissions data, including extensive survey data from applicants, to ensure that our: (1) practices of interviewing all applicants prior to offer and; (2) requirement for relevant work experience as part of the conditions of entry; were not imposing unnecessary barriers to entry. Given our inclusive academic entry requirements, the applied nature

³ Vaughan, Adam. 2013. “Four out of five UK children ‘not connected to nature’” *in The Guardian*. 16 October 2013 available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/oct/16/uk-children-not-connected-nature-rspb> [accessed 12th April 2017]

⁴ Nelson, J., Martin, K., Nicholas, J., Easton, C. and Featherstone, G. 2011. *Food growing activities in schools*. Slough: NFER. Available online at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/ofga01> [accessed 12th April 2017]

of our programmes and the ambition to ensure all new students are well prepared to understand course and industry requirements, we have been cautious to change successful arrangements. Our analysis has, however, highlighted that less traditional applicants to our courses are less confident in interview situations and are less able to secure the minimum levels of work experience on some courses that we have considered vital. Accordingly, we have made some changes to our established arrangements, in order to minimise barriers, as follows:

1. We have created an **Access to Agriculture Programme** through which normal work experience requirements are adjusted, on a case-by-case basis, for those from under-represented groups, so that applicants are able to fully satisfy the entry requirements with support through access to a Mentor, fully funded practical skills qualifications (for example in tractor and telehandler training, pesticide use and animal handling), alongside access to established employers with whom we closely work. Whilst we will carefully monitor the outcomes for Programme participants, we are confident that this support will enable students to succeed and progress, in line with other students, despite the adjustments made to entry requirements.
2. **Admissions processes** have been modified, so that successful completion of an admissions interview, on-campus, is no longer a requirement across all course areas for all candidates. Alternative, voluntary Offer Holder Days are provided for post-offer candidates who are encouraged to attend so that they may meet with staff and students to ensure they are clear on course requirements and associated support arrangements.

Outreach Programme

27. Harper Adams' refreshed outreach programme will feature high levels of partnership working with other HEPs and with schools in order to build impact as cost effectively as possible. We will be offering a wide range of on and off-campus events based around projects or large scale events alongside Information, Advice and Guidance sessions. Whilst our outreach offer will be made available to any school or college, the provision will be tailored around a 3-tier approach, depending on the depth of strategic engagement with each school partner.

28. Our outreach programmes will focus on a range of topics relevant to the land and food based sectors in which the university specialises. These projects will complement the outreach work of the **Higher Horizons + National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)**, which is co-located with the Harper Adams' outreach team. Our aim is to maximise the impact of our combined work, to achieve value for money, with the limited resources available. We will also be working collaboratively on programmes with the **Widening Participation Collaborative Group (WCPG)**, **Smallpeice Trust**, **Royal Society of Entomology**, the **Engineering Council's Big Bang** programme and **Explore Primary**, as well as the **East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP)** in support of our impact evaluation work. The latter will be invaluable since our small scale of operation makes the HEAT tracker software, funded by HEFCE, unsustainable. We will also work with **Bright Crop** to support our mentoring work.

Higher Horizons+ NCOP

29. Harper Adams University is an Outreach Hub in the Higher Horizons+ Consortia⁵, part of HEFCE's National Collaborative Outreach Programme. The consortium was awarded £11.8m in January 2017 to deliver targeted collaborative outreach in Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Shropshire until December 2020. Whilst work carried out by the NCOP team is not covered within this Access Agreement, the NCOP project and Access Agreement work seek to complement each other and allow for joined up working in achieving the collective HEFCE, OFFA and our own Access goals. We are keen to ensure that the activity undertaken by the Harper Adams NCOP hub works in synergy with the existing and planned outreach work of the institution. The NCOP programme's resources will be used to assist in the joint development of our large scale projects, which will be rolled out by the university to schools outwith the NCOP allocation of school partners. The Harper

⁵ Details can be found on the Higher Horizons + webpages: <http://higherhorizons.co.uk/about/> [accessed 12th April 2017]

Hub will be working with 22 schools. We will work with the Hub to organise our programme of outreach work within those schools and communities that do not qualify for NCOP support.

Widening Participation Collaborative Group (WPCG)

30. We are actively engaged in collaboration with other HEPs in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the North West as the Widening Participation Collaborative Group. The partner institutions work collaboratively to organise and deliver campus visits to target schools, as well as targeted events for young people in care.

Smallpeice Trust

31. This is a programme based on engineering and delivered on campus in partnership with a charity which specialises in encouraging young people into careers in engineering. One of the areas currently in development is around 'women in engineering' and 'white, working class boys'. To complement this activity, the NCOP will be actively promoting the event to the eligible students within their target schools. In 2016/17, 64 students attended.

Entosci

32. This is an on-campus event run in collaboration with the Royal Entomological Society for schools and colleges. The event ran for the first time in 2016 and, as a "world first", was a huge success, with over 200 individuals in attendance, of whom 51% were from POLAR Quintile 1 or 2 wards. Harper Adams will look to actively promote and encourage attendance from individuals in Key Stages 4 - 5

Big Bang

33. Working in collaboration with Engineering Council's Big Bang programme and the NCOP, we will be holding a large on-campus event, intended to inspire school children to study STEM subjects. Previous Big Bang events have attracted 1,000+ students and we are committed to achieving similarly high levels of participation.

Explore Primary:

34. The initiative is currently entering its fifth year and is due to end in June 2018. The current provision is across Year 5 and Year 6 and has been very effective in enabling each year group to receive two interactions per year, one being an Information Advice and Guidance session and the other a visit to Harper Adams. Harper Adams hopes that the programme will continue but is committed to continuing the work even if the partnership does not continue beyond 2018. We have worked with around 450 students so far over the four years, in contributing to the partnership total of 1,800 participants.

Strategic Programme of Intervention in Partnership with Schools

35. Harper Adams has developed an intensive and personal programme that will aim to raise aspirations and awareness of Higher Education and sectors / careers that initially may not have been recognised by individuals. The overall project will run across the next five years and will work with years 5 to 13. This project will be broken down into three tiers as outlined below. These tiers should enable Harper Adams to set attainment targets with the highest tier of partner and monitor progression as well as providing more effective interactions with students.

36. The university has identified a secondary school (within Quintile 3 but with very high levels of disadvantaged students (for example, 47% eligible for free school meals⁶ against a national average of 26%) and a feeder primary school in Quintile 1 as part of our planned Tier 1 school partnership work. The secondary school's attainment and progression levels are also below the average in the local authority. These two schools will have a very intensive outreach package, the framework for which, is outlined in Table 1. We have also identified ten other schools based in Quintile 1-3 neighbourhoods which will be offered the package of outreach summarised in Table 2.

⁶ 16-18 pupil data accessed via Gov.UK webpages

Table 1 Tier 1 School Partners' Outreach Framework

| Tier 1 – Feeder primary school and Secondary school | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 | Year 13 |
| <p>1 x IAG session Based on an overall introduction to what university is. Utilising interactive teaching styles such as Lego to aid understanding and break down myths surrounding university.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang</i></p> <p>*IAG sessions to be held at the school in less stated otherwise and where possible to have curriculum links.</p> | <p>1 x IAG session Follow up to previous IAG based around an introduction to university. Using games and interactive learning.</p> <p>1 x off site visit Offer the opportunity to experience outdoors learning at venues such as Newport showground. Using teaching facilities inform young people about food sustainability and the supply chain in a practical and relevant manner.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang</i></p> | <p>1 x IAG session Quiz and myth busting around higher education and links industry and careers.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang</i></p> | <p>1 x Harper Adams Visit Introduction to subject areas and interactive activities, raising awareness of careers in land and food based sectors. Using on site facilities to engage pupils in hand on practical's where applicable.</p> <p>Using industry to support sessions and students understanding, the company Exotic Zoo can inform and provide fun and interactive learning platforms with links to land and food based sectors.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang</i></p> | <p>1 x IAG session Highlighting the importance of GCSE choices in relation to requirements for further study and work. Helping to make informed choices for GCSE and further study.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang and EntoSci</i></p> | <p>Introduction session to mentoring To highlight the process of mentoring will work and introduce ambassadors.</p> <p>Mentoring to begin (Brightcrop)</p> <p>STEM Crest Awards Applications open to achieve a STEM crest award over the summer period with Harper Adams University – students to complete personal portfolio and presentation on a selected topic of research.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang and EntoSci</i></p> | <p>1 x IAG session Session around understanding entry requirements and goal setting, understanding realistic and aspirational targets. Identifying routes and potential pathways for further and higher study.</p> <p>Continued mentoring School to feedback to Harper regarding progression.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang and EntoSci</i></p> | <p>1 x Harper Adams campus visit Several sessions around barriers to higher education. Sessions to include follow up on course choices, student finance and introduction to personal statements.</p> <p>1 x IAG session Follow up sessions for support with personal statements and the importance of attending open days. <i>Promotion and criteria checklist for HAE residential.</i></p> <p>Continued mentoring</p> <p>Paid places at HAE (Harper Adams Experience) £40 paid for each place, offered to pupil premium students across the cohort.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang and EntoSci</i></p> | <p>1 x IAG session Visit from student ambassadors to cover student life and preparing for university. Highlight other opportunities for study and work.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of Big Bang and EntoSci</i></p> |

Table 2 Tiers 2 and 3 School Partners' Outreach Framework

| Tier 2 (10 selected schools) | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|
| Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 | Year 13 |
| <p>1 x IAG session Based on an overall introduction to what university is.</p> <p>*IAG sessions to be more reactive to school's requirements, set catalogue of sessions per year group to be devised.</p> | <p>1 x IAG session Follow up to previous IAG based around an introduction to university.</p> | <p>1 x IAG session Quiz and myth busting around higher education and links industry and careers</p> | <p>1 x Ambassador led session Introduction to student life, question, and answer.</p> | <p>1 x IAG session Highlighting the importance of GCSE choices in relation to requirements for further study and work. Helping to make informed choices.</p> | <p>*Invitations for project based events on campus.</p> | <p>1 x IAG session Session around understanding entry requirements and goal setting, understanding realistic and aspirational targets. Identifying routes and potential pathways for further and higher study.</p> | <p>1 x IAG session Follow up sessions for support with personal statements and the importance of attending open days.</p> <p>Promotion of HAE and Open Days.</p> | <p>Feedback from the schools in % going on to university.</p> |
| Tier 3 – all other outreach provision | | | | | | | | |
| Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 | Year 13 |
|  <p>Catalogue menu of sessions on offer and advertised via the university webpage and through school and college interaction. Schools and colleges will be able to request visits from staff and ambassadors. Harper Adams will be more reactive to these requests and will look to staff where possible. Sessions can be tailored and downloaded for in school use by staff if required. These schools and colleges will also be able to request on campus taster days. All sessions will still follow a longitudinal approach with development through the key stages.</p> | | | | | | | | |
| <p><i>* All of the above tiers will receive invites and information regarding all other activities and events on and off campus, such as the projects explained above. These invites will go to the relevant year groups and to relevant curriculum areas where applicable.</i></p> | | | | | | | | |

Evaluation of Impact of Outreach Work

37. The University is developing a multi-faceted evaluation framework for the outreach activities outlined above, evaluating their impact in increasing overall HE participation and the widening participation objectives of this University, specifically. The University has established that, presently, the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) tool is unaffordable. However, through a combination of investment in partnerships and more precise use of the University's, and other, existing datasets (including from planned investment in a Customer Relationship Management database), a robust evaluation framework is in place, as follows:

Key Evaluation Partnerships

38. **NCOP:** Through the NCOP hub, the University will engage in, HEFCE's evaluation programme for NCOPs led by CFE Research. While the work of the NCOP does not contribute directly to the Access Agreement, the University is of the view that there will be a lot to be learnt from this evaluation programme, applicable to all outreach work.

39. **EMWPREP:** Harper Adams is investing in the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP), which is a collaboration of nine Midlands-based universities, "...that provides a targeting, monitoring and evaluation service for the outreach initiatives delivered by each partner." (EMWPREP, 2017). The University intends to join this partnership both as an institution and through the NCOP hub, with the costs shared 50/50 between the two entities. This is considered to be a much more sustainable and financially secure option for a small and specialist institution. This system will allow institutions to track individuals throughout their education (EMWPREP, 2017).

40. These partnership programmes, and the tools to which the University can gain access via these programmes, enable the University to evaluate the impact of its outreach activities in terms of increasing HE participation across the board.

Institution-level Evaluation

41. In addition, and independently of any external actors, the University also has a nascent evaluation framework in place – that is being further developed in light of the above – using its own data, including applicant survey data, and other 'open data' to which it has access. In evaluating the impact of outreach work, the key outcome measure is the number of applications from students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the subsequent conversion of those applicants into higher education generally and to Harper Adams specifically. The University already monitors – through Academic Board, as outlined above – applications and conversion rates from a variety of disadvantaged groups, including: disabled students, POLAR Quintiles 1 & 2, ethnic minorities, mature students, those from urban areas, and those with vocational entry qualifications.

42. The development of the University's outreach evaluation framework also incorporates a narrowing of scope in order to make assessments about the specific partnerships outlined above. To that end, the University will specifically evaluate the impact of its local schools partnership programme by: a) monitoring the overall HE participation rates in those schools, using Department for Education data about Key Stage 5 progression; and b) specifically measuring applications, and their outcomes, to the University from the identified Tier 1 and Tier 2 partner schools. A baseline for this evaluation work has already been established.

43. Regardless of investment in costly tracking tools, or the ongoing existence of partnership programmes, this evaluation framework provides the University with a holistic view of the extent to which the full programme of outreach activity – and wider efforts, such as branding – is achieving the intended aim of making the University more accessible to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Attainment Raising

44. Harper Adams University does not prioritise academic qualifications as a means to select applicants. It has a permissive and inclusive admissions policy and welcomes applicants with academic, vocational and access entry qualifications. In the 2014-16 entry years, only 16% of

entrants were categorised as high tariff and many of these were BTEC holders. BTEC awards are known to be over-valued in tariff terms and, notably, HEFCE considers all BTEC entrants to be at high risk of early leaving, and is one of the reasons why we have developed extensive on-course support. We admit all students who we believe will succeed, including those with no level three academic qualifications, for whom we offer extended year preparatory programmes. We also offer Foundation Degrees which require modest entry qualifications and, for those who perform well, we enable them to transfer to Honours Degrees. As one of the smallest English universities with an expensive, specialist subject base to resource, and with no existing teacher training expertise nor management experience of 14-19 education, we are unable to redirect front-line funds to support further school sponsorship and management arrangements (noting our support of the JCB Academy since 2010) intended to raise attainment across a broad-based, level three curriculum. Additionally, as a university with inclusive entry requirements, we are unlikely to recoup any financial investment that would accrue from improved level three attainment, as would be the case for a highly selective entry provider. Notwithstanding these challenges, we recognise that aspiration and attainment raising should complement each other and that we are able to make a contribution to the work to raise attainment in schools and workplaces. Our planning has not been fully completed since we need further discussion and formal agreement with partners. The attainment raising work that is under discussion with three partners is summarised in paragraphs 45-47. Table 7a sets out a key provisional output target for 2018/19. The associated quantified attainment outcome targets are still under active discussion and 'sign-off' by our partner's leadership team.

STEM Crest Awards

45. We have been working with a small number of local pupils and supported them through Silver and Gold STEM Crest awards. We are in discussion with our key secondary partner school to establish a more strategic approach to offering access to the Crest award scheme by identified pupils, across each level. We believe that exposure to interesting research projects and completion of the demands of the awards will better prepare year 9-13 pupils for entry to Higher Education in STEM subjects and that completion of the Silver and Gold awards will strengthen the personal statements of those who chose to apply to highly selecting universities, including possible integration with level three Extended Project Qualifications. Attainment raising targets with our Tier 1 secondary school are under active discussion. The working plans that we are actively discussing, for each academic year are as follows:

1. Four year 10 pupils will successfully complete the Silver STEM Crest Award (30 hours each) through our laboratories, with dedicated technician and academic staff support
2. One year 10 pupil will successfully complete the Silver STEM Crest Award (30 hours) through our Outreach team, in particular working on media production
3. Four year 12 pupils successfully complete the Gold STEM Crest award (70 hours) through our laboratories, with dedicated technician and academic staff support
All pupils invited to STEM Colloquium and Awards Event
4. Facilitate training as STEM Ambassadors to provide in-school mentoring support for as many Year 12 and 13 pupils who would like the opportunity
5. Provide a programme of curriculum support through access to our brand new laboratory building, specialist equipment and technician support, with a view to raise STEM subject aspiration and attainment, as follows:
Retention of GCSE Biology to A level Biology to increase by 10%
Attainment at GSCE level to increase by 1 point on average (using 9-1 scale)
Attainment at A level to increase by 4 UCAS tariff points on average.

JCB Academy

46. Harper Adams will continue working with the JCB Academy to support around 130-140 year ten pupils to spend a residential week at Harper Adams, as part of their induction to the JCB Academy programme. Year 12 students also experience a HE Taster Day. We are in discussions with the Academy, one of the most successful and for which we are the key university partner, to provide further interventions and attainment and to recognise this work through agreed attainment targets.

Marches Centre of Manufacturing and Technology with Grainger and Worrall

47. Harper Adams is currently in discussions with Grainger and Worrall, a local Engineering company which is spearheading the development of a Centre to reduce the skills gap of young and mature learners within the region. Harper Adams will look to provide some of its expertise in Maths Engineering and Computer Aided Design to raise aspirations and attainment in level three Maths and CAD, as an essential qualification for career development and / or HE level study in Engineering, both of which lead to social mobility. It is likely that some of this work will take place in the context attainment raising towards Degree level apprenticeship aspirations, in line with local need. Whilst we understand that this is not within scope of OFFA, we believe such work is of value and should be recognised accordingly.

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

48. 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.

49. 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.

50. 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. 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.

51. In preparing for 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 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.

52. We have a commitment to improve the on-course success rates of all our students, including those who are considered 'OFFA-countable'. Increased capacity for identifying possible causal relationships will enable us to better target the work of our educational development and quality enhancement team. The 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. We plan to undertake comparative analyses of on-course success at a more granular level than previously, so we are better placed to identify and take action on any programme-based pockets of disparate performance, rather than focusing our efforts solely on institutional level comparisons of different student groups.

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

53. 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.

54. 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 53), 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.

55. 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. 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 but directly into employment.

56. 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. The Careers Service runs 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.

57. 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 (fully funded fees) 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 2018/19

58. 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 modest levels of means-tested financial support activity have 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 recent experiences in managing our hardship fund, we also have concerns about the financial health of middle household income students, who were not eligible for maintenance grants nor significant maintenance loans. We, therefore, plan to continue offering hardship funds in 2017/18 and will continue to monitor the demand for such, and evaluate their impact, in planning for 2018/19. Accordingly, the 2018/19 agreement includes provision for a hardship fund in 2017/18, but does not make a commitment beyond 2017/18. We have launched a new Full Fees Merit Scholarship solely for those from backgrounds which are under-represented at Harper Adams University. We intend to offer six Scholarship awards for 2018/19 entrants and to promote the scheme heavily through 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 have promoted 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.

59. 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 2016/17, 106 awards to the value of £400,000, 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.

60. Evaluating the impact of specific financial interventions, including the Development Trust Funds, the Hardship Fund, and Success Scholarships, will take place under a new evaluation framework, which narrows the focus of the above to the constituent groups involved. The framework has three aspects to it, focusing predominantly on the outcome measures already monitored by the wider University and recommended by OFFA's 'Closing the Gap' report.

1. Evaluating the extent to which the recipients of the funds meet OFFA-countable criteria. For example, 81% of 2016/17 Development Trust awards were made to students with at least one characteristic of disadvantage.
2. Evaluating the access, retention, progression and success of recipients, where applicable, and benchmarking both against a comparable control group, and also against recipients' previous performance (eg in first year) as an indicator of 'added-value'. Outcome measures include:
 - a. Retention into second year, and progression beyond.
 - b. Assessment grades and average marks on course, particularly in exams.
 - c. Completion of degree, and attainment of 'good' degree.
 - d. Graduate employment outcomes, and 'successful outcome' metric (i.e. graduate-level work or further study).
3. Evaluating qualitative feedback from the recipients of the funds as to their impact, against their reasons for initially applying for funding.

5. Targets and Milestones

61. 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 reside in low participation neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1-2), 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. High levels of BTEC entrants will also result in the continued 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

62. The Director of Academic Services & Academic Registrar at the University and the Director of Marketing, 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. Evaluating the impact of the full package of measures and interventions, as outlined in the Access Agreement, will be undertaken through regular reports to the University Executive and the Board of Governors, as part of an ongoing project to enhance the manner in which performance indicators are reported, in line with the expectations of both internal and external stakeholders. The Academic Board of the University will also receive an annual report in the autumn term each year, evaluating the University's overall performance on access, retention, progression and success for all disadvantaged groups. This report covers targets and milestones set out in the Access Agreement. Paragraphs 37-43 set out our approach to evaluating the impact of our outreach work and paragraph 60 outlines how we will evaluate the impact of our financial award schemes. The University believes that the steps taken to enhance the impact evaluation of all of its interventions related to access, progression and success, alongside financial support, will contribute significantly to the achievement of the targets and milestones outlined in this Agreement as these interventions continue to improve.

7. Information to Applicants and Prospective Students

63. 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 2018/19 admissions cycle, in line with the expectations of consumer contract and protection regulations.

64. All applicants seeking admission to a course at Harper Adams University are invited to the campus for either an interview or to attend an Offer Holder Day 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.

8. Consulting with Students

65. The final version of this agreement was approved by the SU President. Discussion on the final Agreement detail 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 broad approach for 2018/19 at an earlier stage of its development, as part of the Academic Board's routine business.

9. Equality and diversity

66. 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.

67. 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.

68. 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.

69. 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.

70. 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

Table 8 – Sponsorship arrangements