

# Harper Adams University

## 2019-20 access and participation plan

### Assessment of current performance

#### Institutional context of our performance

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 (April 2018), the University has 2,529 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. Our location, within one of the least densely populated English counties, is rural and not well served by public transport. Our subject base covers agriculture, agri-business, animal health, countryside and environment, agricultural engineering, food production and supply-chain, land and property management, and veterinary related subjects. From 2018/19 we will also offer applied life science subjects to complement our agriculture, animals and countryside and environment programmes.
3. 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. Improved social mobility and the creation of more equitable life chances through Higher Education aligns with our work in providing well prepared and socially diverse graduates who can ensure our agri-food chain and rural economies thrive in a global context. In meeting this challenge at our relatively small scale of operation, it is essential that we focus available funds on those activities that we have evaluated will have most impact on student enrolments, success on-course and progression into employment or further study. This Plan sets out how we aim to achieve this ambition.
4. We believe that, whilst the majority of our student population is from a rural background seeking to pursue a career in support of the rural economy, these figures are, nonetheless, 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. Our land-based specialism results in a predominantly rural, national catchment. Typically, around 80% of our new entrants are from a rural background, compared with 19% of the population according to the 2011 census. This does affect our ability to attract students from low participation neighbourhoods, as low participation neighbourhoods are overwhelmingly urban. This distorts our performance indicators related to education disadvantage / participation using both the POLAR 3 and new POLAR 4 categorisations. Both data sets suggest below benchmark performance as a consequence of our rural catchment, which is wholly in line with our institutional mission. Just over 90% of all Q1 wards are categorised as urban and over 78% of all Q2 wards are urban. Despite this, our published benchmarks do not take into account the specificity of our subject mix, conflating our subject focus on the primary agricultural production and food chain management with others' provision in equine and other animal sciences and food technology or preparation, where rurality is not a significant dimension but against which we are benchmarked. There are six pockets of rural wards that are Q1 or Q2 but their locations are extremely distant from our campus in Shropshire, with five of the six being coastal areas. Furthermore, categorisations such as POLAR do not always reflect dimensions of rural disadvantage, such as those identified in the Social Mobility Commission's 'State of the Nation 2017' report. Over one third (36% in 2015) of our students come from the most isolated rural settings ('Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings', ONS definition),

compared to just 3.5% of the total population. The Social Mobility Commission identified that, “*The new social mobility coldspots in our country are concentrated in remote rural or coastal areas*”, and that, “*only...14 per cent of disadvantaged young people in remote rural coldspots progress to university compared with 27 per cent in hotspots.*”<sup>1</sup> Remote countryside and coastal areas have the greatest proportion of social mobility coldspots of any areas of the UK<sup>2</sup>. Much of this is attributed to rural isolation and weaker partnership working, with a particular observation that, “*remote schools often have too few low-income pupils to be eligible for outreach from employers or universities – meaning that those pupils slip through the net.*”<sup>3</sup> Harper Adams is working to address some of these barriers and improve collaboration as set out in paragraphs 36-44.

5. We work with rural communities and schools spread thinly across the UK’s rural areas, given that 80% of our students are from a rural background. Our student population has a series of demographic, locational, social and income-related characteristics that differ from the general population and impact upon access and participation across our institution, more so than in larger, non-specialist providers. This highlights the need for the OfS to take into account the nature of rural HE provision when assessing our Plan. To this end, we ask that the OfS considers the established Government Policy of ‘rural proofing’<sup>4</sup> during its review of our Plan, to ensure that proper account is taken of the need to ensure that factors in the make-up of the rural student population wishing to study and work in rural environments are fully taken into account.
6. Most mature students study with us on a part-time basis on unregulated programmes which are outside the scope of this agreement. There are, at time of writing, approximately a further 1,782 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 2,907 by the completion of the 2017/18 academic year. 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 this Plan’s remit. We consider our record to be very good in this regard but it is not recognised within our Access and Participation Plan activity or spend. 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 high levels of mature students (95%) and state schooling (99%).

### **Assessing our access, success and participation record**

7. Our performance is evaluated as follows, within our unique context explained in paragraphs 1-6. On a routine basis, we monitor access, on-course success and progression to employment or further study for those with the following characteristics: low participation neighbourhood (LPN) background; black and minority ethnicity; over 21 on entry; disability; care leaver; parental occupation; urban background; low household income; vocational entry qualified. The **access** data includes applicant numbers, offer and enrolment rates; on-course **success** data includes first year early leaver rates, average marks, award level; and **progression** data includes graduate destinations, distinguishing further study and professional and managerial outcomes. This data is considered by our Academic Board and a summary of it by our Board of Governors. For 2018/19, we have created a new Success and Retention Committee which will, in particular consider more detailed aspects of the Access and Participation Plan, including the monitoring and evaluation of activities intended to support on-course success, taking account of student characteristics (paragraphs 46, 47, 50, 54). Since 2017, this data has been produced not only at an institution level but also at course suite level so that isolated pockets of outlying performance are not masked, with the intention that action plans be developed at course level where necessary. For example, the Animal Health and Wellbeing course team, which looks after relatively high numbers of LPN students, was asked to improve progression for its graduates, which has been below the exceptionally high levels for other course areas, and so worked with the Careers Service to develop a specific event schedule for its final year students and for careers advisors to contribute to the first year Professional Scholarship Programme. Routine student feedback suggested that, for 2018/19, these

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<sup>1</sup> **Social Mobility Commission (2017)**, *State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain*, p. v

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60

<sup>4</sup> **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2017)**, *Rural proofing: Practical guidance to assess impacts of policies on rural areas*. March 2017 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-proofing> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018]

career development activities need a lower start point than in 2017/18. A further illustration of the ways in which we routinely review and revise activity is that, based on student, tutor and employer feedback, the annual University-side Careers and Placement Fair will, in 2018, incorporate a discreet zone to promote animal health and wellbeing employment opportunities. In 2017, we provided course teams with application and enrolment performance indicator data by student characteristic, so we could evaluate the extent of variation between courses and, more importantly, encourage teams to identify further scope for changed practices in order to support more students from under-represented backgrounds to enrol and succeed with us. We also consider intersections of characteristics that we have assessed are crucial to our context. Since 2016, we have also created an annual profile of risk ratings based on intersections of characteristics, which is used by course tutors and professional services staff to intervene at the earliest opportunity and actively scan for warning signs that a student is at risk of early leaving. For example, by analysing data at these intersections over four years, we know that the group most likely to withdraw in their first year of study are mature students from low participation neighbourhoods, followed by disabled students who come from an urban background and enter with vocational qualifications (BTECs). It is, therefore, encouraging that our annual performance indicator monitoring shows that continuation improved in 2016/17 for mature students, disabled students, urban students and vocationally-qualified students, over-and-above the overall institutional improvement. Paragraphs 11-31 assess performance on access, success and progression against key student characteristics: LPN background; black and minority ethnicity; over 21 on entry; disability; care leaver; parental occupation; urban background; low household income; vocational entry qualified.

8. More broadly, in relation to **access**, it is of note that UCAS defines Harper Adams as a low tariff provider and we are not highly selecting in that we offer both Foundation Degree and Extended Foundation Degree routes for those with more modest entry qualifications, alongside our more selective Honours Degree programmes. Nonetheless, the applied nature of all our programmes, including the mandatory sandwich year, means that we take care to ensure that applicants are well informed about our subjects of study and associated careers, so that they are well prepared for their studies. Accordingly, until the 2017 admissions cycle, all course areas have required interviews and many have required relevant work experience. We have recognised that both these requirements have the potential to advantage those candidates who are more connected with the industries that we primarily serve or who are from a more privileged background with family networks. We have, thus, reviewed these requirements, with the intention of being more sympathetic to those from urban or less advantaged backgrounds (paragraphs 12, 33, 46).
9. Broadly, student **success** as measured by continuation in Higher Education is typically around benchmark. The over-valuation of BTEC qualifications<sup>5</sup> within the UCAS tariff and our large proportion of entrants holding at least one BTEC qualification (which has risen from 18% in 2012 to 39% in 2017) results in benchmarked data that does not sufficiently take the difficulties experienced by BTEC entrants into account. Notwithstanding this, at an overall level, student achievement in relation to continuation tends to be around benchmark. Student success, as measured by Honours Degree Classification (HDC), is not currently benchmarked, although our Academic Board has noted the increasing proportion of graduates achieving higher HDCs within the sector, when compared with our own levels. The three year mean for the proportion of high HDCs in the 2015-17 leavers was 57%. Since 2017, we have been assessing differential success levels of students with different characteristics within Harper Adams in order to identify whether there are groups who are performing less well than others and for which intervention might be necessary.
10. Broadly, our graduates have one of the best graduate outcomes (**'progression'**) performance in the sector, in part, for the reasons and associated investment levels set out in paragraphs 77-81. We consistently perform above our benchmark, with employment levels typically around 97-98%. In addition to our close working relationships with employers and employer representatives, we create applied curricula and our rural campus provides an exceptional environment in which our students can practise applying theory to real world problems. Whilst our graduates have an enviable record, we have also started tracking the outcomes for different student groups so that we can be confident that all can benefit equally from the significant investment that we make in supporting the development of employability skills and the provision of outstanding networking opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> As reflected in HEFCE Student Success Premium grant high risk assignment and as reported on by, for example, [Banerjee, PA \(How successful are BTEC students at university?, WonkHE, May 2018\)](#), [Myhill, D \(Barriers for BTEC students to fit in at high-tariff universities, HEFCE, December 2017\)](#) & [Moutford-Zimdars, A et al. \(Causes of differences in student outcomes, HEFCE, July 2015\)](#)

## Students from areas of low higher education participation

11. **Access for LPN applicants:** In 2016/17, the proportion of young undergraduate entrants from the poorest performing quintile (Q1 using the POLAR 3 basis) was 4.6% against our benchmark of 10% (HESA Table T1). Annual reports to governors indicate that this figure has been consistently around 5% since the 2012/13 intake. Paragraph 4 explains this apparent under-performance against benchmark. Our UCAS equality data indicates that for main cycle applicants, Q1 applicants have historically experienced lower offer rates than the average, although this fell to a -1.5% differential in 2017 (from a high of -11.7% in 2012), in line with the remedial measures outlined in paragraph 7. In line with the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) adoption of Q1 and Q2 combined as a measure of educational disadvantage/LPN, we agreed with the Office for Fair Access that, from the 2018/19 Access Agreement, we would also use Q1 and Q2 combined as a slightly better basis on which to judge this aspect of access, given the slightly higher presence of rural wards within the Q2 quintile (as paragraph 4).
12. At the institutional level, internal data indicates that Q1 and Q2 applicants have a slightly lower than average enrolment to application rate (-2.7%) but that it is higher for Foundation Degree Q1 and Q2 entrants than the average (at +3.7%). There is variation between course suites and this is linked to the entry qualifications required. Given the overall inclusive nature of our qualification entry requirements, the availability of alternative entry routes and the transfer opportunities between Extended, Foundation and Honours Degrees for students who perform well on-course, we believe our approach to be highly appropriate and that lowering already inclusive entry qualification requirements would be reckless. We are, however, pleased to see that our recently revised approach to our outreach work (paragraphs 33, 46, 55-72), our admissions practices, including our new Access to Agriculture Programme (paragraph 61) are already having an impact with a 3% point increase in the 2017 intake of students (compared with 2016 entry from a Q1 or Q2 background and a further 3% point increase in Q1 and Q2 applicants in 2018 thus far, compared with 2017). In seeking to increase enrolments from educationally under-represented geographical backgrounds, we will also reach applicants from low household income families and from black and minority ethnic groups, because those characteristics are more prevalent in Q1 and Q2 wards.
13. **Success for LPN students:** The most accessible continuation data for Q1 and Q2 combined is that presented through the TEF metrics. Our benchmarked data indicates that our Q1 and Q2 students perform in line with the benchmark. Most recent HESA continuation data (March 2018, for 2015/16 entrants) also indicates that continuation rates for those from a Q1 (only) background, was at or above benchmark. Notwithstanding this, in 2017, we set ourselves the target that our own combined Q1 and Q2 student group will achieve a continuation rate within 3 points of all our students, since we believe this to be a valid comparator. Our three year aggregated TEF3 metric of -2.2% (Q1 and Q2 compared with all students) indicates that we broadly achieved this ambition for those three entry cohorts up to 2014/15. Our internal data for 2016/17 entrants identifies that whilst we achieved our target for Foundation Degree students (-2.4%) following improvement on the previous three years, we did not do so for Honours students following a deterioration on the previous three years (to -10.6%). Specific courses have been identified as contributing to this position and have been tasked with developing success and retention plans to improve the position, as part of a University Success and Retention Plan. In part we believe because of our interventions, first year students from Q1 and Q2 backgrounds have performed consistently within 3% points of all students in relation to year one average marks, another one of our measures of success, although performance has tended to be 1-2% points below others. Recently, we have also been tracking the success of students in achievement of higher Honours Degree Classifications (HDCs), with a view to enable all student groups to perform within 3% points of all students. Pleasingly, this has been achieved over a three year period and, also most recently, in 2016/17 (at +2.3% for Q1 and Q2 groups), which is counter to sector data<sup>6</sup>.
14. **Progression for LPN students:** TEF metrics provide a reference point for student destination outcomes. Within the context of sector-leading employment outcomes, our Q1 and Q2 students also perform above benchmark on employment and further study. The highly skilled employment and further study presents with a neutral metric. This is distorted by the outdated classification of Veterinary Nursing

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<sup>6</sup> HEFCE. 2018. Differences in student outcomes: The effect of student characteristics. 2018/05. Bristol: HEFCE.

employment as 'not' professional or managerial<sup>7</sup>. This course area has the highest proportion of our Q1 and Q2 students and, in 2016, every student progressed to employment as a veterinary nurse, which was clearly their intended outcome. As with other indicators of performance, we have been tracking the destination outcomes for students by characteristic and it is pleasing that, over a three year period, Q1 and Q2 students outperformed all students, once the incorrect classification of veterinary nursing had been corrected in relation to highly skilled employment. This analysis has, however, also identified that one of our less outstanding performing course areas on destination outcomes (Honours animal health and science with a 94% three year employment and further study mean) also has one of the highest proportions of Q1 and Q2 student enrolments and that this has resulted in an overall differential of around -5% points for this course group. This differential has been identified for the course team to identify action to improve the outcomes for this course suite so that they are in line with the rest (paragraph 7).

### Students of particular ethnicities

15. **Access for BME students:** Harper Adams University has not attracted high numbers of applicants from British BME backgrounds, because of its rural focus and location. Around 5% of the England and Wales rural population is BME, and 3% of the Shropshire population is BME, compared with 23% of the urban population. For the nine largest HEIs providing Agriculture and related subjects in England, Wales and Scotland, around 3% of students in the subject were BME, based on HEIDI data in 2016/17. The Office for National Statistics indicates that in the three calendar years 2015-2017, only 0.9-1.5% of agriculture, forestry and fisheries workers were BME, compared to 11-12% of the entire UK workforce in the same period. Since 2011, around 1-2% of our entrants on to full-time undergraduate courses have self-classified as BME, which equates to 8-15 students per intake. Overall small numbers of BME applicants mean that annual UCAS offer rate data is still only available for mixed race applicants and that this is in line with offer rates for white students, albeit with variation between years. Small numbers mean that meaningful data in relation to particular ethnic sub-groups is not available, although for internal reporting purposes, we aggregate over three years. Our revised outreach strategy and work to target Q1 and Q2 applicants will enable us to encourage more BME learners to consider a career in our specialist sector and associated studies (paragraph 58). Encouragingly, our application rates from those with BME backgrounds have increased as we have broadened our portfolio of courses, from an average of 1.6% of applications in the years up to 2010, reaching 2.2% in 2015, 2.4% in 2016 and 2.8% in 2017. While this has resulted in an increase in acceptances and enrolments, (for example we had our record level of acceptances of 12, or 1.7%, in 2016), it is not yet as consistent as the increase in applications. The main reason for this is that BME applicants are, overwhelmingly, more likely to apply for some of our more selective courses: in the last three years, 35% of applications have been to Veterinary Nursing and Bioveterinary Science, which otherwise account for only 20% of applications. The overall rejection rate on these courses has been 48%, whereas the rejection rate for BME applicants has been broadly similar at 52% (on a small sample of an average of 26 applications per year).
16. **Success for BME students:** The aggregated three-year TEF 3 data (three cohorts up to 2014/15 entry) indicates that continuation rates for BME students was 94.1% which is +4.9% point above benchmark, although low numbers render this not statistically significant. This BME continuation rate compares with the White student continuation rate of 91.8%. Internal data relating to BME student success rates (that is, a successful first year outcome) has a three year mean of -1.7% (one student), which is within our ambitions of differentiation of within +/-3% for students with specific characteristics. The five year average first year student exam marks for BME students were reported to Academic Board as virtually identical to overall average mark achievement (+0.2%) for Foundation Degree students but a five year negative difference of -5% has been identified for BME Honours Degree students. Weighted assessment marks were more similar, with a -2% differential. Our other measure of success, which is achievement of higher HDCs, is pleasing in that Home BME student achievement was identical to that of all students in 2016/17.
17. **Progression for BME students:** TEF3 metrics indicate that BME destination data is non-reportable as response rate thresholds have not been met. Our own analysis of internal three year data indicates a 100% employment or further study rate and a +10.9% difference in highly skilled employment or further study at 85.7%, although there has been variation between years which has prompted intervention.

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<sup>7</sup> The SOC2010 coding of vet nursing profession as 'non-professional' is currently being reconsidered by the Office for National Statistics, given the widely held view, strongly supported by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, that it should be re-categorised as 'professional'

## Mature students

18. **Access for mature students:** As set out in paragraph 6, Harper Adams works with a large number of mature learners through its non-regulated provision, which is, regrettably, out-of-scope for recognition within the University's Access and Participation Plan. This provision is flexible in its scale and in its mode of delivery and, as directly linked to employment opportunities, is highly attractive to mature learners, looking to improve their career and life opportunities. Reports to Academic Board have observed modest increases in mature entrants on to our regulated provision, from 4.4% of the total in 2012 to 6.0% in 2017, from around 30 to 40 new mature students a year. We are flexible in the academic entry requirements for mature students and consider their experience and our evaluation of motivation through interview in judging their preparedness for higher education, including on to our Extended Foundation Degree programme for those with the most modest entry qualifications.
19. **Success for mature students:** Table T3 of HESA continuation data for 2015/16 entrants indicates a 12.1% non-continuation rate for mature first degree students (one student) against a benchmark of 10.8%, which is not a statistically significant difference. This compares with a corresponding figure of 4.1% for 'all students' who entered their course in 2015/16, denoting a -8% difference. The three-year aggregated TEF 3 data also indicates a lower continuation rate than for the 'young student' continuation rate by -4.8% points (two or so students), although this is not significantly lower than our benchmark. Internal data also identifies that, over a five year period, mature students are slightly less likely to have successful first year outcomes than the 'all student' average by around -6% points (again, that is two or so students). Scrutiny of three-year data at course level indicates that this observation applies across many course areas and at that level of granularity relates to the outcomes for single students. The predominant cause is one of self-withdrawal, as opposed to academic failure at the end of the year. Student numbers are low but a common underlying cause of self-withdrawal for mature students relates to the competing demands on their time, in light of their higher caring, work or financial commitments. A predominantly younger age group student environment has also been identified by a small number of mature students as contributing to their own challenges and has probably contributed to some individual decisions to withdraw. In 2017, we established a Mature Student Network to help overcome some of these challenges. We take care to provide advice and guidance to our small number of mature students who are reviewing their career and study options, so that, if they leave early, they are well informed about the alternatives. Our internal, aggregated three-year, data indicates that our mature Honours Degree students who successfully complete their first year studies do so with very slightly higher mean marks than 'all students', with a mean of 60.8%. Mature students are more likely to achieve a higher level HDC, with a three-year average differential attaining a first or upper second class honours of +5.5% points.
20. **Progression for mature students:** TEF 3 data indicates that progression into employment or further study is as high for mature students (at 97.3%) as it is for all students and outperforms sector benchmarks with a high degree of materiality and statistical significance. Our mature student rate of progression into highly skilled employment or further study (at 61.2%) is also above the sector benchmark for mature students, although is below that for 'all our students' (at 70.5%). Our own data, which includes consideration of the 'professional and managerial employment' metric which excludes consideration of the 'further study' component of the conflated TEF metric indicates that our mature students out-perform other students by +4.5% points.

## Disabled students

21. **Access for disabled students:** The proportion of all full time undergraduate students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) in 2016/17 was 16.6%, in excess of the benchmark of 9.7% (HESA Table 7). This compares with 18.2% in 2015/16, with the reduction accounted for by the changes to DSA funding entitlements. It constitutes the sixth highest proportion of any English higher education institution in both 2015/16 and 2016/17. In anticipation of the changes to the DSA, and recognising that, internally and across the sector, disabled DSA recipients typically perform better than disabled non-recipients, we revised our own targets to reflect self-declared disability, rather than restrict our attention only to DSA recipients. In 2016/17, the proportion of new entrants with a self-declared, university-verified disability was 19.3%. In 2017/18, the corresponding provisional figure, at the time of writing, is 21.5%. We take particular care to advise disabled applicants on the ways in which they can be supported to succeed and all campus-based applicant interview or offer holder days include the provision of professional guidance which probably partly contributes to the high levels of disabled student enrolments.

22. **Success for disabled students:** Three year aggregated TEF 3 data identifies a –4.7% point differential for continuation for all disabled students when compared with the non-disabled, for the entry cohorts up to 2014/15 and a non-statistically significant negative differential against benchmark. More recent, internal data indicates that the year-on-year investment in, and development of, our provision for disabled students has been effective in improving first year success, with progressive improvements, from 87.7% success in 2012/13 to 91.9% success in 2015/16 and 94.0% success in 2016/17. This most recent data indicated +2.1% points above the ‘all student’ figure. Academic Board has reviewed performance data for 2016/17 that demonstrated that average marks achieved by disabled students were within 0.5% of the overall achievement level. Equivalence of success for the graduating cohort was also noted by our Academic Board, in that virtually the same proportion of disabled students achieved higher HDCs as ‘all students’, which we believe to be a testament to the investment support we have made.
23. **Progression for disabled students:** Our disabled students, as all others, have excellent progression outcomes. TEF 3 metrics illustrate a three-year mean of 96.4% into employment or further study, with 98.1% of non-disabled students going into employment or further study. The figure for disabled students is statistically significantly above its benchmark. Based on this data, progression into highly skilled employment or further study for disabled students is not only above its sector benchmark (by +10.2% points), it also exceeds the rate for our non-disabled students by +3.0% points, although the position for 2016 leavers had deteriorated, demonstrating the need to maintain attention on disadvantaged groups in successive years.

### Care leavers

24. **Access for care leavers:** We have participated in targeted Looked after Children (LAC) and Care Leaver events organised through the collaborative Widening Participation Collaborative Group and are hosting one event in 2018. These events are intended to advise and guide care leavers on their higher education options. We also make special provision to cover costs of attending for interview or offer holder days but have received very few applications to our courses, in large part because of our rural location and specialist curriculum offer. Accordingly, we enrol in the region of only 1-3 care leavers each year on to our regulated provision. Nonetheless, having reviewed our application and enrolment record in the preparation of this Plan, we have identified the need to investigate other ways to engage with LAC and care leavers. Accordingly, we will work with the ‘Become’ charity to proactively promote the support available, through our own webpages and those of the ‘Propel’ site. We will continue to participate in and deliver events for LAC and care leavers through the WPCG network.
25. **Success for care leavers:** Tiny data sets make publication of success outcomes unwise. We are very conscious of the additional challenges that care leavers face and, for these reasons, provide year-round first year residential accommodation if requested, prioritise care leavers for residential accommodation beyond first year, on request, and include care leavers within our broader interventions in support of student success.
26. **Progression for care leavers:** As with measures of success, tiny data sets make publication of progression outcomes unwise although we have monitored such to inform our own advice and guidance practice. Accordingly, as with other characteristics of disadvantage, we seek to ensure that individual care leavers are made aware of the many networking and employment opportunities that our placement and careers services can provide.
27. **Other characteristics of potential disadvantage and intersections of disadvantage:** Our unique context means that we also consider other aspects of under-representation when setting out our activities. These characteristics are summarised in paragraphs 28-31.
28. We have consistently enrolled high levels of students from backgrounds of disadvantage based on **parental occupation**, using the SEC IV-VII categorisation to determine low socio-economic background. Many such students, with farm worker parents, are from isolated rural areas, which are under-recognised using standard measures of disadvantage. When HESA was publishing benchmark data, we consistently exceeded our benchmark of around 39-40% by around 6-8% points. Our ambition is to maintain access levels from those from these lower socio-economic groups, above the baseline year indicator of 46.5%. Internal monitoring of this student group has identified that three-year first year continuation rates and average marks are in line with the University mean. Looking at white, working-

class (using SEC IV-VII to define 'working class') males, in particular, these typically comprise around 41% of our total applications, and in the last three years they have been more likely to receive an offer than our overall average, with a 67% offer rate compared to 66% overall. Once on-course, performance has not typically been a concern for this group, other than for first year withdrawal rates where this group has been around 4% points less likely to continue (in 2014/15 and 2015/16, with 86.2% continuation compared to 90.1% overall), although this reduced to just -0.6% points in 2016/17 (91.6% compared to 92.2%). Overall, our students from SEC IV-VII backgrounds are more likely to achieve a 'good honours' degree and more likely to go into employment or further study, looking across three year trends.

29. Our context of a predominantly rural background intake means that we also take care to consider the outcomes of students from an **urban background**. Efforts to improve access by under-represented groups including POLAR Q1/Q2, mature, BME and care leaver students intersect with our ambitions to improve access to those from urban backgrounds, not only for reasons of social inclusion and broadening the backgrounds of our students, but also in recognition of the demographic change in the rural population, whereby the decline in 18 year olds over the next three years is much sharper than in urban populations and the forecast reversal is slower in rural than in urban areas. Internal data indicates that 2016 and 2017 entries experienced slightly higher levels of new enrolments from urban backgrounds (22% as opposed to a previous five year mean of 19%). Three year internal data indicates that urban students continued at about the same rate as all students and average first year mark levels were identical to all students. Over a three year period, British urban students achieved slightly more higher HDCs by +1.2% points, were also as likely to enter into employment or further study as other students, and were more likely to enter highly skilled employment or further study than all students by +8.5% points, once the outdated SOC classification of vet nursing as 'not highly skilled' is corrected.
30. We have experience of students from rural, and in particular agricultural, backgrounds being subject to highly fluctuating household incomes, based on the volatility of agricultural output prices, European Union support measures and farm incomes. In 2017/18 only 19% of our students had verified **low household incomes** (below £25,000), whereas in previous years this proportion of students from low income households has been considerably higher. The DEFRA Farm Business Survey data on farm incomes highlights the extreme volatility in farm, and thus household, income for many of our students whose parents are farm workers or who work close to either side the 'farm gate' within the food chain. Using 2009/10 as a base year, in the seven years since then, we have seen variation ranging from -36% to +43%. For this reason, it is difficult for us to use household income as a useful target measure. Our internal analysis of the success and progression rates of our low household income students is that they are consistently in line with those of all students and, accordingly, we intend to cease monitoring this specific data through our Academic Board, so that we can focus on other characteristics of disadvantage.
31. Students with **vocational qualifications** are not as well represented in many universities as they are at Harper Adams University. Changes to secondary education has resulted in higher applications and, thus enrolments from, students with BTEC qualifications, predominantly within low and medium tariff universities. Each successive entry year since 2012 has seen an increase in the proportion of students entering with at least one vocational qualification (sometimes combined with an A level) from 18% to 39% in 2017. Our experience, as with the rest of the sector, is that BTEC qualification holders are not as well prepared for Higher Education as those entering with A levels and as recognised through HEFCE's Student Opportunity Fund algorithms in relation to 'at risk' students. Our Academic Board has observed that BTEC entrants have a three-year continuation rate of -7.6%, first year mean marks are -4.0% below the overall mean and have a -5.9% differential on good HDCs. We recognised this position several years ago and our interventions over the last three years (2014-2017) have resulted in an 8.1% point improvement in continuation and improvements in mean first year marks by 2-3% for Honours and Foundation Degree students. Progression outcomes to employment and professional and managerial employment are, however, comparable to those of other students. Our analysis has also identified that students entering with BTEC qualifications are more likely to be from under-represented or disadvantaged groups, including the following characteristics: mature, disabled, Q1/Q2, care leaver or BME background. Accordingly, some of our intervention work visibly focuses on vocationally qualified students who are more likely to engage in support programmes on that basis than on the basis of other, more sensitive, personal characteristics. Our experience of what works is, accordingly, represented in our broad programmes of support outlined in paragraph 75.

## Ambition and strategy

32. Our outcome targets were approved by the University's Academic Board and are based on those set out in our 2018-19 Access Agreement and as recorded in Table 8 of the resource plan, submitted as a separate Excel file. The University's specialist and high-cost context (paragraph 3) demands efficient and effective resource deployment to maximise impact and maintain financial security. This is reflected in the balance of spend commitments and the deployment of resources on specific activities.
33. **Access targets** relate to increasing enrolment rates of students from Q1/Q2 backgrounds (from 12% for 2017 entrants to 16% by 2021 entry), NS-SEC IV-VII backgrounds (from 46.5% to 49%) and maintaining sector leading levels of disabled entrants, in spite of changes to the Disabled Students Allowance, at 19%. Given our sector-leading work with mature students on unregulated provision we have not set specific mature student access targets for our regulated provision. Whilst we believe our outreach work targeted at Q1/Q2 LPN area students will also reach BME, low household income and care leaver students, we have not set specific targets for these groups, largely because of our specialist curriculum, rural reach and rural location. Nonetheless, we will take all opportunities in support of outreach aspiration and attainment raising work and include those characteristics as criteria within our criterion-based work. Since 2016/17 we have developed a more strategic approach to our access activities as outlined in paragraphs 55-72, in particular focusing on identified partners and activities and also working to complement the work of the Higher Horizons + National Collaborative Outreach Programme. We set out the access work that will support our ambitions to further diversify our entry profile; there are indicators that recent changes to both our outreach strategy and admissions arrangements, in addition to the potential presented by our changing curriculum offer, are now making an impact, with increases in entrants from Q1 and Q2 backgrounds in 2017 and further increases in applicants in 2018; our intentions are coming to fruition.
34. **Success and progression targets** relate to our ambitions to improve overall continuation rates and to maintain a sector leading employment record. Importantly, within our success and progression ambitions, we have set operational targets such that no student group should under-perform on first year success rates, on employment or further study or highly skilled employment or further study rates by more than a specified level, with year-on-year harmonisation of outcomes. Given that we also consider that BTEC qualified students face disadvantage and the intersection with other measures of under-representation or disadvantage, we have also set corresponding first year operational success targets. Paragraphs 11-31 highlight that there are some student groups who have not succeeded on-course, or progressed into positive employment or further study outcomes, at the same rate as other students. We are proud of our work in improving success and progression outcomes for disabled students. We have recognised the need to provide considered support to those from **Q1/Q2, mature and care leaver** backgrounds, as their outcomes are not as consistently good as for others, whilst those for **BME** students are broadly comparable, albeit with year-on-year variations to this picture. We are also clear that those who enter with a **BTEC qualification** also require additional support and that those students are much more likely than A level entrants to come from one of these backgrounds. We are pleased with our interventions so far in improving success outcomes for this group of students over the last few years. Our experience of intervention programmes, in relation to both success and progression initiatives, is that students are much less likely to engage if they are labelled and that, indeed, poorly managed targeted interventions can prove counter-productive. We have two recent experiences: a programme of career development mentoring support for BME students was not welcomed by any of those approached and they indicated they did not require support beyond that available to others; a small number of care leavers have asked that their status be removed from the records held on them as they believe their needs can be met through the mainstream support (as set out in paragraph 35).
35. We will invest heavily in inclusive practice in teaching and learning for all students. Many of our success and progression interventions and programmes are available to the whole student body, irrespective of student characteristics, but we will continue to profile students for the purposes of individualised support so that those we consider to be most in need of information or guidance can be 'nudged' into engaging with specific programmes. Our experience is that 'all student' programmes are more palatable to students, even if we provide additional encouragement to some individually targeted students to participate. Our small scale of operation means that this approach is necessary for efficiency and value for money purposes but that is also practically achievable, given the close working relationships between academic and professional services staff and between staff and students. Nonetheless, we have also found that we are able to 'badge' some targeted initiatives for BTEC applicants and students in such a

way that they are not counter-productive and, indeed, are valued by participants. We will also develop our support for disabled students where inclusive practices are not sufficient, including beyond those required as reasonable adjustments, in particular in relation to mental health and wellbeing, based on tutor feedback and routine scrutiny of early leaver and exit interview data. Using similar data, we have more recently identified the need for work in relation to a more inclusive social and extra-curricular programme and have plans for our Student Services and Students' Union teams to work on this together. We plan to provide better opportunities for peer mentoring through a 'Campus Life Crew' and a comprehensive calendar of social engagement activities. We have also identified the desirability of developing a 'Respect' campaign which encourages all students, whatever their background, whether that be from a relatively privileged or less well represented background such as an LPN, or from a BME, care leaver, or older age group, to better understand each other's interests and viewpoints. We also plan to work more closely with alumni in order to support all students to successful outcomes, on-course and on graduation. Paragraphs 73-81 set out some of the initiatives we plan in 2019/20.

## Collaborative working

36. Our own **access projects with schools** 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. The university will also be working collaboratively on programmes with the Widening Participation Collaborative Group (WCPG) with particular focus on BME, LAC and Q1/Q2 students. Alongside this there will be a focus on providing a clear package of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for care leavers. We will continue to work with the 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) and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) in support of our outreach and access impact evaluation work (paragraphs 37-44). We are also looking to work alongside Brightside to support our mentoring work.
37. **Higher Horizons+ NCOP:** Harper Adams University is an Outreach Hub in the Higher Horizons+ Consortia<sup>8</sup>, part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme. Whilst spend is not covered within this Plan, work carried out by the NCOP team is included as the NCOP project and Access and Participation Plan work seek to complement each other and allow for joined up working in achieving collective access goals, commonly evaluated using the EMWPREP tool (paragraphs 36 and 67). 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 resources will be used to assist in the joint development of our large scale projects such as 'Field to Fork', which will be rolled out by the university to schools out with the NCOP allocation of school partners. The Harper 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.
38. **Field to Fork:** The Field to Fork event is a large project in collaboration with Shropshire Festivals and Higher Horizons+ (NCOP). The purpose of the event is to celebrate food whilst exploring the careers, pathways and opportunities within the sectors in which Harper Adams specialises. The event seeks to attract a percentage of NCOP target schools from across the entire of the Higher Horizons+ wards stretching across Shropshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire. Harper Adams will also offer this intervention to targeted schools through the tiered (REACHOUT) approach. It will also be a community event to encourage participation with the university from those who would not, otherwise, have had reason to visit the campus. Over two events in April 2018, we were thrilled to be able to welcome 308 school children on site with their teachers and over 9,000 members of the general public, as part of a separate family event to celebrate and highlight the activities and opportunities presented in the sectors we serve. Our initial analysis of our guests' experiences and impact on them in relation to highlighting study and career opportunities within our specialist course areas is that both events surpassed our expectations and so will be continued.
39. **Widening Participation Collaborative Group (WPCG):** 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, formerly a group which was part of the National Network of Collaborative Outreach. The partner institutions work collaboratively to organise and deliver campus visits to target schools, as

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<sup>8</sup> Details can be found on the Higher Horizons + webpages: <http://higherhorizons.co.uk/about/> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018]

well as targeted events for young people in care. We will continue to work with the other HEP's to provide a number of events both at Harper Adams and other institutions to provide focused and targeted campus days and sessions to care leavers, BME and Q1 & Q2 students. Local research<sup>9</sup> has reiterated the need to continue outreach activities through to Year 13 if more 'white, working class boys' are to be inspired to enter HE after A levels, as opposed to employment, as currently the case.

40. **Propel and Become:** Propel is brought to students by Become, the charity for children in care and young care leavers. They provide comprehensive support and advice to LAC and care leavers allowing them to overcome possible barriers to Higher Education. Harper Adams will be investigating ways to work more intensively with Become to access and support this group. The University will create a clearer and comprehensive package for LAC which allows them to access support pre and post application. This will include the creation of a new and updated web presence and improved profiles on partner sites.
41. **Smallpeice Trust:** 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. The feedback from the event stated that for the mobile robotics, 70% of students were now considering university and 90% involved in the off-road sessions were now considering university. We have identified, through tracking, that eight participants have progressed to HE, three of whom progressed to Harper Adams. We will continue to work with Smallpeice and Higher Horizons+ on this collaborative project and will look to do more targeting around applications from Q1 & Q2 students.
42. **Entosci:** 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 as a "world first", and was a huge success, with 51% of participants from POLAR Quintile 1 or 2 wards. In 2018 the event has attracted over 170 students with 89 students being from Q1 & Q2 backgrounds, two groups from home educated backgrounds and schools identified as Wolverhampton's NCOP schools. Our assessment is that this event is effective in inspiring changed attitudes. Over 50% of 2018 participants indicated that they would consider a career and HE studies in entomology as a consequence of their involvement.
43. **Big Bang:** Working in collaboration with the 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. In 2017 the Big Bang event attracted 674 students from 15 schools and colleges of which 67% (8) were Q1 or Q2 schools and 33% (4) were NCOP target schools. The event is aimed at LPN schools and also supports efforts to reach 43 and LAC pupils and encourage them to better understand the benefits of HE study. The event creates an immersive platform for pupils to be exposed to industry and HE opportunities at an early stage; this is particularly important for BME pupils who are less likely to have accessed such 'hands-on' experiences, including insight into the opportunities presented by sandwich courses, which BME students are less likely to complete.
44. **Explore Primary:** The initiative is currently entering its fifth year and was to end in June 2018, but due to its success, it has been granted a 5 year extension. 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. The target schools for Harper Adams are both 100% Q1 or Q2 students with up to 49% FSM and from this year the focus will be more heavily on just Q1 schools. Harper Adams is extremely pleased that the programme will continue and is committed to continuing the positive work.
45. Our **collaborative work with employers** is exceptional and must be maintained if our outstanding record of progression is to be sustained. In March 2018, the [QS World University Rankings](#) ranked us first in the UK and second in the world in Agriculture and Forestry, based on an Employer Reputation measure which drew on survey responses from 40,455 graduate employers worldwide. Our outstanding reputation for our work in connecting employers and our students was reinforced by the publication, also in March 2018, of the [Times Higher Student Experience Survey](#) results. This latter accolade supports our contention that we have the best industry connections in the UK, as has been the case for each of

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<sup>9</sup> National Network of Collaborative Outreach. 2016. The progression rates of white, working class boys to HE.

the two years that this has been an aspect of judgment in the survey. The *What Uni?* Student Choice Awards Scheme also presented the University with first prize for job prospects for the third year running in April 2018. Our industry connections arise from the way in which we involve employers in the design and delivery of our curriculum, applied research including student participation, involvement in an extensive Development Trust programme which provides significant financial and employment opportunities, the various ways we work with employers in supporting extra-curricular activity and, in particular, at the heart of our curriculum, the provision of sandwich degrees. 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 at least £3,000 a student. Some under-represented and disadvantaged student groups, of which we have many, 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 excellent employment outcomes on completion of their studies.

## Evaluation for continuous improvement of measures

46. The specific work that we embark on will be monitored and evaluated in diverse ways, dependent on the activity in question. Paragraphs 65-68 set out our approach to the evaluation of our outreach measures. Other aspects of **access** that relate to our new Access to Agriculture (paragraph 61) programme will be evaluated through student feedback, student success data and considered through the annual course report and reported to the newly created Success and Retention Committee. Initial and informal evaluation, drawing on interim data from students, tutors and attainment records, is that this programme has been transformative for the small numbers of students it has supported in 2017/18. We continually evaluate other aspects of access that relate to admissions arrangements (also paragraph 61), through twice yearly meetings between admissions staff and all course teams, with a view to review offers, including work experience requirements and contextual offers, interview practices and offer holder day arrangements, based on in-cycle applicant data and applicant feedback, alongside enrolment data, in order to minimise unnecessary barriers to all applicants, especially those from under-represented areas.
47. The programmes of support that relate to on-course **success** are routinely evaluated as part of budget setting considerations and also, for some interventions, through routine reports to the Academic Board and also to the newly convened Success and Retention Task Force (now incorporated as the Success and Retention Committee) which is monitoring progress with a Success and Retention Plan. This Plan is co-ordinated by the Director of Learning and Teaching, and includes heads of academic departments and professional services heads. As the Plan develops, student characteristics will be overlaid on to more holistic considerations of the impact on our planned interventions. From 2018/19, the newly created Success and Retention Committee has a specific remit to consider the on-course success aspects of the Access and Participation Plan. Importantly this new committee will be advised by a newly convened Student Participation Panel. The precise nature of routine evaluation of activities depends on the specific activity but will invariably include the consideration of participant feedback of some sort (online surveys or focus groups being the most typical) and impact on student attainment (continuation and levels of achievement at module and award level). The responsible head of service will, where evaluation indicates such is necessary, revise plans for subsequent years. By way of illustration, the Autumn 2017 Transitions Conference was revised based on participant feedback elicited immediately after the event, part way through the first year on-course, plus course tutor and academic guidance tutor feedback on study skills deficiency needs as well as a review of first year attainment levels in both exams and coursework. The evaluation confirmed the overwhelmingly positive impact of the event but also prompted minor changes in relation to greater student ambassador involvement, consideration of health and wellbeing and physical orientation of the campus within the programme.
48. Our **progression** interventions are routinely evaluated through student and employer surveys, the outcomes from which feed into both Academic Board and annual course monitoring considerations, at the same time that placement success and final destination outcome data is considered. This routine assessment of our work ensures that we continually refresh our approaches to supporting students into employment, in particular highly skilled employment, or further studies. Paragraph 7 provides an illustration of how a need was identified based on outcomes; the subsequent development of the intervention career development programme was informed by internal course survey data, the DLHE survey data and student and tutor feedback in relation to plans for the 2018 Careers and Placement Fair. Internal Course, Placement, Placement Employer, internal Careers Service, Destination of Leavers from Higher Education and National Student surveys and Professional Advisor reports are routinely

considered in the development of each successive years' activities, and as routinely reported to Academic Board and annual course reports each Autumn.

49. Our arrangements for **financial support** have been evaluated in successive years, drawing on student feedback and outcomes data (predominantly new student survey data, early leaver data, although award levels were also reviewed until student feedback indicated, on the whole, that the financial support made little difference to their ability to devote their full attention to their studies) and have resulted in changes to our arrangements, where we have seen they are not making the desired impact. We have withdrawn all household income contingent financial awards as student feedback did not indicate that the investment was justified and the student view was verified in considering success outcomes data. At the time of writing, our initial evaluation of our Success Scholarship Scheme (introduced for 2017 entrants and revised modestly 2018 entrants based on 2017 recipient feedback and the quality of applications) is that it is difficult to establish that it is providing value for money in raising aspirations amongst those from under-represented backgrounds to pursue a career within our industries. In part, this is because that Scheme is one amongst several outreach and admissions practice initiatives intended to raise the profile of our sector as providing excellent career opportunities amongst those who might not be aware of such. Accordingly, we have not made a commitment to running a scaled down Scheme for 2019 entrants within the resource plan, although it is possible that we will do so, once our in-progress evaluations are complete. Our current assessment is that Development Trust and Hardship Fund provision both make significant impacts on student success and progression and so should continue. Impact of the Development Trust work, in conjunction with employers, draws on student feedback data that seeks to establish the positive benefits of their awards, not just in financial terms but in the wider opportunities the awards present, as well as subsequent recipient award levels and graduate outcomes. This feedback is fed into Trust meetings and reported to the University Executive, in its consideration of our work. Overwhelmingly positive analyses are reinforced by student outcomes and also by a year-on-year increase in the numbers of employing organisations which contribute to the activities of the Trust and provide both financial support and progression opportunities to students who are typically in the later years of their sandwich programmes. To date, we have used our own student records to evaluate any differential outcomes achieved by students in receipt of the various financial support schemes but will explore using the evaluation tool that is made available to providers along with data submitted to HESA.

### **Monitoring progress against the Plan's intended objectives and outcomes**

50. The Plan is monitored in a number of ways and these have recently been strengthened following the recommendations of an Internal Audit on our management of the Access Agreement. Progress against the access components of the Plan is now a fortnightly University Executive agenda item and is considered alongside broader undergraduate admissions data. Whilst most meetings are presented with a summary of relevant Plan outreach activities, once a term, the Executive also monitors progress against the targets of the most recent Agreement/Plan. The Academic Board considers access, success and progression data against student characteristics at its autumn meeting and its spring meeting considers the final monitoring return for the previous academic year, alongside the plans for the in-preparation Plan for next admissions cycle. Since 2017, course teams have been presented with corresponding data but have not been tasked with specific targets. The Board of Governors is apprised through a summary of progress and plan in the tri-annual Vice-Chancellor's report to Governors. Whilst the University Executive pays particular attention to monitoring the access aspects of the Plan, more frequent considerations of the on-course success components will be undertaken by the newly formed Success and Retention Committee (paragraph 46). The terms of reference require the new Committee to contribute to the Plan's development, including the consideration of relevant data to evaluate the impact of individual initiatives, taking account of student characteristics.

### **Equality and diversity**

51. The University's Single Equality Scheme (SES) 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 and, in particular, intersects with activities set out in our Access and Participation Plan in relation to the characteristics of disability and race. A revised, proactive and systematic approach to undertaking Equality Analyses (previously referred to as Equality Impact Assessments) is in place for existing and new policies, underpinned by online training for staff. Our 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan has been subject to an Equality Analysis. The University's

Equality and Diversity working group (EDWG), made up of staff and students from across the institution, has continued its work to support the delivery of our SES and Action Plan. The current SES covers 2017-19. Accordingly, when it is reviewed, along with the supporting membership of the EDWG, the relevant Access and Participation Plan activities and outcomes will be explicitly, rather than implicitly, incorporated into the SES.

52. The Governors reviewed progress with equality objectives in April 2018 in relation to elimination of unlawful conduct, advancement of equality of opportunities and fostering good relations, including in relation to applicants and students who are disabled or BME. A number of activities that promote 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. We have also run an extensive programme on 'unconscious bias' with a view to identify and eradicate it, including in relation to admissions decision-making. 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. Curriculum managers are due to audit the ways in which equality and diversity considerations have been incorporated into our revised undergraduate curriculum, so that we can be confident that all students are well prepared for studying and working alongside others who are different to themselves and ensure that our good practice is observed across our programmes. Three of our more established undergraduate programme areas have recently required students to participate in extra-curricular 'unconscious bias' training. We are currently reviewing our induction arrangements for 2019 entry, with a view to extend them further, including making space to give more attention to the need to respect diversity. The proposed 'Respect' campaign (paragraph 74) aims to supplement this basic level of guidance, which is considered especially important for many who originate from isolated, rural backgrounds and have not, hitherto, been exposed to working with others from diverse backgrounds. Such campaigns are considered especially important to ensure that the students from better represented or advantaged backgrounds are clear on the benefits of studying and living alongside others with protected characteristics, alongside their personal legal obligations, in the context of the Equality Act 2010. A new student policy on sexual violence, violent behaviour, bullying and harassment has been developed which includes behaviour expectations towards minority groups.

### **Student engagement**

53. We have involved students in the development of our Access and Participation Plan activities in three main ways:
1. Through informal involvement in the development and evaluation of the various activities set out in paragraphs 55-83. By way of examples: our Guide to Inclusive Practice in Learning, Teaching and Assessment was co-written with student course representatives; an independent critical friend spoke with many student groups in relation to the effectiveness and impact of our learner support arrangements; student ambassadors provide feedback to colleagues after outreach events to help improve them; and students have been directly involved in developing, delivering and evaluating outreach activities as part of their taught curricula. A second example relates to the ways in which students help shape our outreach activities: firstly, a second year group of students helped to design and deliver an interactive, on-campus event for a Tier 2 School, as part of their curriculum; secondly, paid student ambassadors were charged with creating and delivering curriculum-based activities as part of the Field to Fork event (paragraph 38). This approach was so successful (based on participant feedback) that Engineering students have revised an activity so that it can be transportable to running off-campus.
  2. Through close working with our Students' Union to enable it to extend the extra-curricular, participation activities it provides financial and organisational support for, so that there is a wider range of social and sporting activities for students with increasingly diverse backgrounds and needs. These plans have been discussed frequently within the newly formed Success and Retention Task Force. Our SU Presidents in 2016/17 and 2017/18 have been keen to engage in this work with us, and this has been supported by the transfer of staff from the University into the Students' Union in 2017. Our current President says, "The SU has been keen to ensure that all our members can lead an active social and sporting life that enables them to mix with other students. With our small, rural campus based community, this is important as it is not always easy for students without their own transport to get involved in off-campus activities. We developed a WP Social Programme in 2017/18, with additional financial support from the University, so that everybody can get involved, whatever their interests!" Based on wider student feedback (prompted by internal course surveys, exit interviews and wellbeing staff advice), the University has, from 2018/19, supported the creation of a

second sabbatical post, with a remit to broaden the social programme even further and which was incorporated into the Plan's activities at drafting stage.

3. Through formal participation as elected student representatives. By way of example, there are three full members of the Academic Board that has, over the course of many years, considered and approved the Access Agreements which were the forerunners to this Plan as well as the annual monitoring data. The timing of the release of the guidance for the production of this Plan meant that the Board approved a broadly similar approach to the 2018/19 Access Agreement, having considered the performance indicators for 2016/17. Since 2015, student representatives have considered institutional level data on applications, continuation, performance at module and award level and final destinations, by gender, age, disability, POLAR and entry qualification, in order to identify whether any group appears to be disadvantaged, with a view to consider possible remedial measures. In 2017, we extended this approach to course level monitoring, since we had identified some large differences in performance between courses that had the potential to be overlooked when only reviewing course level data. This Plan has also been considered by the Board of Governors which includes student representation.

54. We have, nonetheless, identified the desirability of encouraging more students with different characteristics of under-representation or disadvantage to be more engaged in work at a formal level. Accordingly, we plan to create a Student Success Panel, drawing from a wide background of students to help shape and evaluate the work undertaken through our Success and Retention Plan and the newly created Success and Retention Committee, which has a specific remit for aspects of the Access and Participation Plan (as paragraph 47).

## **Access, student success and progression measures**

### **Access measures**

55. A more strategic approach is being 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 who form the largest percentage of disadvantaged young people in our most proximate urban geographical area. Targeting this particular group would involve focusing on pupils, across genders, from Q1 and Q2 backgrounds, in line with our targets. 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.
56. 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. 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 inter-connectedness of food and the environment is currently limited.
57. ***Understanding the social mobility challenges in our region:*** The intention in this Access and Participation Plan is 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.
58. ***White, 'working class' boys and the inter-relationship with targeting BME pupils:*** 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

documented<sup>10</sup>. 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 (but see paragraphs 69-72 covering our work in this regard), the predominance of this challenging group in our region, means that they must remain a key target, notwithstanding that our own 2016 entry intake constituted 23% white, working class males (as determined by parental occupation, ie those in socio-economic classification groups 4-7). *About a Boy* from the National Educational Opportunities Network<sup>2</sup> (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, using the POLAR Q1 and Q2 designations as determinants of ‘working class’, given the difficulties of targeting outreach work on the basis of parental occupation, when working within school partnerships:

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 have been working to address this, so that outreach activities involve role models with whom target pupils can self-identify.
2. **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 internationally successful Harper Rally Team, these aspects of the offer can be utilised more strongly than others within the programme of interventions.
3. **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.

Whilst, for geographical and associated cost-effectiveness reasons, Harper Adams’ own strategic partnerships focus on pupils who are ‘white, working class’, outreach activities undertaken in conjunction with our NCOP hub will also enable us to reach relatively higher numbers of BME pupils, given their target school populations have higher numbers of BME children. The NCOP partnership (paragraph 37) enables the University to access pupils in 20 additional schools with both relatively high LPN and BME populations, so that we will provide a joint residential programme aimed at inspiring young people to consider STEM study and careers. The success of our work with the Smallpeice Trust (paragraph 41) gives us confidence that these events can be transformative for both LPN and BME participants. Since 2016 when our more strategic approach to targeting our outreach work in regional, urban schools was put in place (paragraph 55), we have already observed higher numbers of young people from LPN and BME backgrounds making course enquiries at UCAS events, especially for established Veterinary and Engineering related courses and this is also reflected in very recent increases in applications from both groups (paragraphs 12 and 15).

59. **Understanding the challenges and opportunities specific to our specialist subject areas:** 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 research<sup>11</sup> 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). A report by the RSPB in 2016, led to a headline in *The Guardian*<sup>12</sup>, “*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. These research

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<sup>10</sup> Webster, 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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 11th May 2018]

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

1. **The crucial role of visits to the countryside and farms**, in particular, to enhance a student's understanding of food production.
2. A key theme of education around food is **the growing of food in schools** themselves.
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.
4. **Tackling the stereotypes:** Again, the AHDB/FACE report points to significant stereotypes around the farmer and food production.

In addition to the significant investment we have made in internal data analysis capacity over the last three years, we are in the process of commissioning consultancy work, with a view to establish whether there are specific access points which are creating unnecessary barriers for LPN and BME groups to overcome.

60. **Addressing these Challenges:** 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. 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. 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.
61. **Understanding Specific Barriers to Entry at Harper Adams University:** We have considered four 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 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 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 driving and tele-handler operations, safe use of pesticides, wellbeing of animals during transport), 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. Our initial analysis is that this programme has worked very well for its first entry cohort over their first year of study.
  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. We have also made provision for on-line interviews for those who request them.
62. **Outreach Programme:** Harper Adams' refreshed outreach programme will feature high levels of partnership working with other HEPs, Higher Horizons+ 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.

Our outreach programmes will focus on a range of topics relevant to the land and food based sectors in which the university specialises.

63. **Strategic Programme of Intervention in Partnership with Schools:** 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 partner and monitor progression as well as providing more effective interactions with students.
64. 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 meals<sup>13</sup> 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. We have also identified ten other schools based in Quintile 1-3 neighbourhoods which will be offered a less intensive package of outreach. This partnership is additional to that with the NCOP hub (paragraph 37). The lifecycle stages are presented visually in Table 1.
65. **Evaluation of Impact of Outreach Work:** 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:
66. **NCOP:** Through the NCOP hub, the University will engage in HEFCE's evaluation programme for NCOPs led by CFE Research. The work that NCOP does very much compliments the wider approach of our outreach provision so the University is of the view that there will be a lot to be learnt from the evaluation programmes, applicable to all outreach work. Both the University Outreach team and its NCOP hub belong to **NEON** (paragraph 36), which provides another, cost-effective mechanism to support evidence-based decision-making, through access to conferences, research tools and outcomes. We have applied to host the 2019 national conference in support of our and others' evaluation plans.
67. **EMWPREP:** Harper Adams has invested 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 has joined 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 Harper Adams to record all outreach work carried out and the level of detail put into the system will allow a much more in depth analysis of the outreach work and specific projects such as the tiered REACHOUT programme. As part of this the university will actively seek to capture data from students that have participated in a category 2 activity (eg workshops or masterclasses), this data then allows institutions to track individuals throughout their education and evaluate the impact of all HEI outreach activity recorded (EMWPREP, 2017).
68. 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. 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

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<sup>13</sup> 16-18 pupil data accessed via Gov.UK webpages

achieving the intended aim of making the University more accessible to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

69. **Attainment Raising:** 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 21% 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 (notwithstanding our support of the JCB Academy as its single University 'Core Challenge' partner 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 underway with three partners is summarised in paragraphs 70-72.
70. **Residential Weeks for JCB Academy:** 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.
71. **Crest Awards for Local Pupils and Building STEM Attainment:** We have been working with a small number of local pupils, supporting them through Silver and Gold Crest awards. We are taking a more strategic approach to offering access to the Crest award scheme by identifying eligible pupils. 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. We aim to achieve the following:
1. Five 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. 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 are invited to STEM Colloquium and Awards Event. We will also provide a programme of curriculum support through access to our brand new laboratory building, specialist equipment and technician support, alongside access to the CREST Award Scheme, with a view to raise STEM subject aspiration and attainment with our Tier 1 Secondary School, as follows: Retention of GCSE Biology to A level Biology to increase by 10%; Attainment at GCSE 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.
72. **Agriculture GCSE for Primary Age Children:** As part of the tiered programme, REACHOUT, Harper Adams will be working closely with Wombridge Primary School to create an Agriculture GCSE which will be completed before children progress to secondary school. The qualification will be delivered by the primary school staff and heavily supported and created by tutors and other staff at Harper Adams. We are looking to create an interactive learning curriculum based on existing Agriculture qualifications that will give students at Wombridge the opportunity to visit large commercial farms, interact and learn from industry professionals in consideration of the whole food chain. As a university, we recognise the important role it plays in equipping young people with the skills and knowledge to allow them to make informed decisions around their future and as Mr Sturdy (MP) commented, "*One of the foremost functions of our education system is to equip young people with the necessary skills to contribute to the*

**Table 1 Tier 1 – Feeder Primary School and Secondary School**

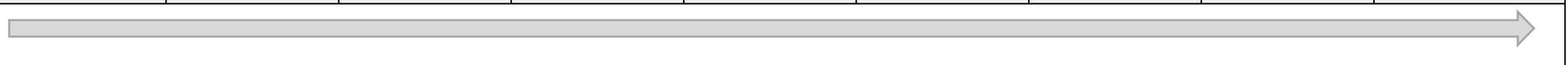
Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Based on an overall introduction to what university is. Utilising interactive teaching styles</p> <p><b>Mentoring</b> Exploring opportunities to work with online mentoring.</p> <p><i>*Promotion of on campus events</i></p> <p>*IAG sessions to be held at the school in less stated otherwise and where possible to have curriculum links.</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Follow up to previous IAG based around an introduction to university.</p> <p><b>1 x off site visit</b> Offer the opportunity to experience outdoors learning. To inform young people about food sustainability and the supply chain in a practical and relevant manner.</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Based on higher education and links with industry and careers.</p>	<p><b>1 x Harper Adams Visit</b> 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><b>1 x IAG session</b> 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><b>Mentoring</b> Exploring opportunities to work with online mentoring.</p> <p><b>Crest Awards</b> Applications open to achieve a 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 on campus events</i></p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> 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><i>*Promotion of on campus events</i></p>	<p><b>1 x Harper Adams campus visit</b></p> <p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Follow up sessions for support with personal statements and the importance of attending open days.</p> <p><b>Paid places at HAE (Harper Adams Experience)</b> £45 paid for each place, offered to pupil premium students (Capped at 10 places, student to use personal statements as application – selection criteria).</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Visit from student ambassadors to cover student life and preparing for university. Highlight other opportunities for study and work.</p>

**Tier 2 (10 selected schools)**

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Based on an overall introduction to what university is.</p> <p>*IAG sessions to be more reactive to school's requirements,</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Follow up to previous IAG based around an introduction to university.</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b></p>	<p><b>1 x Ambassador led session</b> Introduction to student life, question, and answer.</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Highlighting the importance of GCSE choices.</p>	<p><b>*Invitations for project based events on campus.</b></p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Session around understanding entry requirements and goal setting.</p>	<p><b>1 x IAG session</b> Follow up sessions for support with personal statements</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



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

*\* 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.*

*social and economic life of our country,”* (Telegraph, 2017). Harper Adams and Wombridge believe an Agriculture GCSE would allow pupils to fulfil a range of careers and, secondly, it would support the farming sector, which is in need of a larger, more diversified pool of young, educated graduates.

## Success Measures

73. The University provides high levels of post-entry support to students. All new students are offered early screening 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 11, to provide bespoke Learner Support to students. 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 Course 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.
74. The University’s Student Services team provides 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. Professionally qualified mental health and counselling staff are supported by a number of other ‘Wellbeing Champions’. 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 have invested 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. 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. Recent analysis has prompted us to develop the concept of a ‘Respect’ campaign, to enable all students to fully participate in the life of the University, whatever their interests or background, alongside an extended social programme.
75. 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 and diversity of assessment formats 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 Course Tutors to provide targeted support to BTEC entrants during pre-entry and in their first year of study. These interventions have been successful to date and we plan to be more systematic in the ways we deploy the work of this team to target support to those from a Q1/Q2 background, or who are mature, a care leaver or BME.
76. 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 is 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.

## Progression Measures

77. 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. Through these programmes, our students typically achieve around 500 nationally recognised 'licence to practise' awards that directly supports employability in technical, specialist areas. This extra-curricular provision 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.
78. 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 77), 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.
79. 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 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 'countable' within our resource plan) 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.
80. 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.
81. 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 from under-represented or disadvantaged background who might aspire to go on to full-time postgraduate level study in 2019/20, 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 Postgraduate Loan Scheme.

## Financial support to students who enter in 2019/20

82. 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 high overall cost, although we will continue to review available evidence. On the basis of our experiences in managing our hardship fund, we also have concerns about the financial health of middle household income students, who were not eligible for significant maintenance loans. We, therefore, plan to continue offering hardship funds. We launched a new Full Fees Merit Success Scholarship solely for those from backgrounds which are under-represented in 2017. We promoted the scheme heavily through schools and colleges with poor progression rates to higher education based in and around Q1 and Q2 neighbourhoods. Our hope was 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), would 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 in our subject areas. As paragraph 49, at the time of writing, our initial evaluation, based on applicant backgrounds and student feedback, has not yet provided compelling evidence of the Scheme's impact and value-for-money in relation to its objectives. Accordingly, we have not included this provision in the resource plan although might extend the Scheme to 2019/20 entrants on a more modest basis; to be decided prior to September 2018.

83. Harper Adams 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 2017/8, 148 awards to the value of £404,000, funded by 55 sponsors, were distributed to 100 disadvantaged or under-represented students primarily in their second or final year of studies. This Scheme serves to provide financial support but also demonstrates 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. Our ability to provide these awards is clearly dependent on the continuing support of our employer partners but our Trust will work hard to maintain our current provision, despite an uncertain economic climate within the agri-food sector. The Trust also works with charities and private donors whose objects support the provision of higher education opportunities for students who are seeking a career in the agri-food chain and related industries.

## Investment

84. The expenditure set out in this agreement means that we estimate we will make an indicative investment of around **£1.43m** per annum (estimated at around **28%** of high fee income, above the basic level), on outreach, student success, progression and financial support in 2019/20, specifically for those who are under-represented or disadvantaged in higher education. In total, based on our plans, we will invest around **£2.85m** in 2019/20. This will include 'access-countable' expenditure, together with anticipated targeted grant allocations and other work that is not countable, such as in relation to reasonable adjustments costs. This overall investment is intended to inspire, encourage, support and enable a wider range of students to benefit from higher education and progress into worthwhile careers or further study. The 'countability' and affordability of some activities outlined in this agreement are unpredictable because of the uncertainty over future levels of funding associated with OfS targeted funding. Notwithstanding these uncertainties, the indicative forecast institutional summary spend is as follows for 2019/20: access spend of **£456k**; student success spend of **£425k**; progression spend of **£283k**; and financial support of **£269k**. The balance of spend takes into account our desire to make an 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, whilst maximising the potential of all our students to succeed on-course and to progress to positive graduate outcomes, whatever their personal backgrounds.

## Provision of information to students

85. At the time of writing, the University plans to charge fees in line with the fee cap. The University's position on tuition fees will be clearly set out in 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 2019/20 admissions cycle, in line with the expectations of consumer contract and protection regulations. We have a comprehensive Key Information Page for applicants and students that includes a comprehensive Fees and Charges Brochure for two rolling entrant years, including a clear statement on the basis of any inflationary fee increases, as follows: *"The University reserves the right to increase fees each subsequent year by no more than the rate of inflation (RPI-X) in*

*line with government guidance and any cap on tuition fees applied by the government. You should, therefore, budget for modest increases. We anticipate that any increase will be supported by the government's student finance system."*

86. 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.
87. There are no plans for guaranteed bursaries or fee waivers for 2019/20 entrants, as those available are awarded on-course. The Fees and Charges Brochure includes a link to the Undergraduate Finance page and makes clear the basis of the awards available and will include the Success Scholarship if the evidence indicates it should be retained for 2019/20 entry.
88. This Access and Participation Plan will be hosted on the University's Publication Scheme pages and there will also be a link from our Key Information Page, which also provides a short narrative on what the Plan is about, that is, "*Our Plan to support social mobility and to support access, on-course success and progression to employment for under-represented or disadvantaged groups*".

\* course type not listed.

Full-time and part-time course fee levels for 2019-20 entrants.

Please enter inflationary statement in the free text box below.

The University reserves the right to increase fees each subsequent year by no more than the rate of inflation (RPI-X) in line with government guidance and any cap on tuition fees applied by the government.

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,250
Foundation degree		£9,250
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		£1,850
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*
Franchise full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		*
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*
Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	- Vet Nursing top-up	£4,218
First degree	- Part-time study of full time courses	£6,935
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE	- Vet Nursing Advanced Diploma	£4,218
CertHE / DipHE	- Livestock Auctioneers	£1,875
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*

**Table 8a** - Statistical targets and milestones relating to your applicants, entrants or student body

Reference number	Stage of the lifecycle (drop-down menu)	Main target type (drop-down menu)	Target type (drop-down menu)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target? (drop-down menu)	Baseline year (drop-down menu)	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
								2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
T16a_01	Access	Disabled	<b>Other statistic</b> - Other (please give details in the next column)	Maintain proportion of full-time, self-declared, university-verified, disabled entrants, despite changes to DSA funding	No	2013-14	18.8%	19%	19%	19%			
T16a_02	Access	Socio-economic	<b>Other statistic</b> - Socio-economic (please give details in the next column)	Increase proportion of NS-SEC classes 4-7 young entrants to all undergraduate courses	No	2013-14	46.5%	48.5%	49%	49%			HESA has ceased publication of benchmark data for NS-SEC, so we have removed reference to the benchmark aspect of this access target
T16a_03	Student success	Multiple	<b>HESA T3a</b> - No longer in HE after 1 year (All, full-time, first degree entrants)	Improve non-continuation in HE of UK domiciled full time first degree entrants	No	Other (please give details in Description column)	4.5%	4.1%	4%	4%			Baseline of 2012 entrants recorded in 2013-14 HESA record
T16a_04	Student success	Multiple	<b>HESA T3d</b> - No longer in HE after 1 year (All, full-time, other undergraduate entrants)	Improve non-continuation in HE of UK domiciled full time other undergraduate entrants	No	Other (please give details in Description column)	11.6%	8.5%	8%	8%			Baseline of 2012 entrants recorded in 2013-14 HESA record
T16a_05	Progression	Multiple	<b>Other statistic</b> - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	Maintain a sector leading employment rate	No	Other (please give details in Description column)	96%	96.8%	97%	97.2%			Baseline of 2014 graduating cohort
T16a_06	Access	Low participation neighbourhoods (LPN)	<b>Other statistic</b> - Other (please give details in the next column)	Increase proportion of new entrants from POLAR3 Quintiles 1-2	No	2016-17	12%	14%	15%	16%			

**Table 8b - Other milestones and targets.**

Reference Number	Select stage of the lifecycle	Main target type (drop-down menu)	Target type (drop-down menu)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target?	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
								2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
T16b_01	Student success	Multiple	Operational targets	Improve year one success so that all under-represented entrant groups perform within 3 points of the overall success rate, full-time, first degree entrants	No	2014-15	Not achieved	Within 3.8%	Within 3.0%	Within 3.0%			Improve year one success so all under-represented entrant groups perform within 3 points of overall success rates - to include disabled, SEC IV-VII, low household income (<£25k), mature, LPN and BME entrants
T16b_02	Student success	Multiple	Operational targets	Improve year one success so that all under-represented entrant groups perform within 3 points of the overall success rate, full-time, other undergraduate entrants	No	2014-15	Not achieved	Within 3.8%	Within 3.0%	Within 3.0%			Improve year one success so all under-represented entrant groups perform within 3 points of overall success rates - to include disabled, SEC IV-VII, low household income (<£25k), mature, LPN and BME entrants
T16b_03	Student success	Multiple	Operational targets	Improve year one success so that BTEC entrants success rate is within 3 points of the overall success rate, full-time, first degree entrants	No	2014-15	Not achieved	Within 3.8%	Within 3.0%	Within 3.0%			Improve year one success so that BTEC entrants success rate is within 3 point of the overall success rate, full-time, first degree entrants
T16b_04	Student success	Multiple	Operational targets	Improve year one success so that BTEC entrants success rate is within 3 points of the overall success rate, full-time, undergraduate entrants	No	2014-15	Not achieved	Within 3.8%	Within 3.0%	Within 3.0%			Improve year one success so that BTEC entrants success rate is within 3 point of the overall success rate, full-time, undergraduate entrants
T16b_05	Progression	Multiple	Operational targets	Achieve employment outcomes (in work or further study) for under-represented groups that are in line within 3 points of the overall rate, full-time, first degree entrants	No	2014-15	Not yet known	Within 3.8%	Within 3.0%	Within 3.0%			Support under-represented groups to achieve employment rates within 3 points of overall employment rates - to include disabled, SEC IV-VII, low household income (<£25k), mature, LPN and BME entrants
T16b_06	Progression	Multiple	Operational targets	Achieve professional and managerial employment outcomes for under-represented groups that are in line within 3 points of the overall rate, full-time, first degree entrants	No	2014-15	Not yet known	Within 3.8%	Within 3.0%	Within 3.0%			Support under-represented groups to achieve employment rates within 3 points of overall employment rates - to include disabled, SEC IV-VII, low household income (<£25k), mature, LPN and BME entrants
T16b_07	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Recruitment events	No	2011-12	705	830	830	830			No of individual engagements
T16b_08	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Student mentoring	No	2011-12	0	5	6	7			No of students mentored
T16b_09	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (summer schools)	Experience days	Yes	2011-12	300	300	300	300			No of students participating. Attendance at traditional summer schools has been declining. From 2015/16 collaboration with other partners is resulting in a new type of summer school (delivered at Easter) which is proving more popular.
T16b_10	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Open days and campus tour afternoon	No	2011-12	800	870	870	870			No attending, financial support with travel costs available for those for whom this might be a barrier

T16b_11	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Shows and events	No	2011-12	434	1000	1000	1000			No of individual engagements at public shows
T16b_12	Access	Attainment raising	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Master classes	No	2011-12	3	4	5	6			No of masterclasses
T16b_13	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	National Collaborative Outreach Programme (Higher Horizons +); Widening Participation Collaborative Group; Explore Primary; East Midlands WP Research and Evaluation Partnership	Yes	2015-16	2	4	4	4			No of networks engaged with
T16b_14	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	No. activities delivered in collaboration within collaborative networks	Yes	2015-16	10	11	12	13			Minimum commitment to support general aspiration raising events
T16b_15	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	No of activities delivered collaboratively with primary schools specifically	Yes	2015-16	4	5	6	6			No. of primary level events per year
T16b_16	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	Access to Agriculture Programme	Yes	2016-17	0	11	17	22			Total number of students from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds who participate in the Harper Adams Access to Agriculture Programme of work experience and skills development
T16b_17	Multiple	Multiple	Operational targets	Fees-free Success Scholarship	No	2016-17	0	6	1	1			Total number of successful recipients, meeting merit and under-representation criteria
T16b_18	Multiple	Attainment raising	Strategic partnerships (eg formal relationships with schools/colleges/employers)	CREST award participation with key partner school	Yes	2016-17	0	9	9	9			Number of pupils supported to achieve a CREST award with key School partner
T16b_19	Multiple	Multiple	Other (please give details in Description column)	Recipients of Development Trust awards	Yes	2017-18	100	100	100	100			Maintain number of Development Trust awards made in conjunction with employer sponsors to students from an under-represented or disadvantaged background
T16b_20	Access	Attainment raising	Strategic partnerships (eg formal relationships with schools/colleges/employers)	GCSE attainment with key partner school	Yes	2017-18	Mean tariff point increase of 1			Increase mean UCAS attainment score in Biology GCSE by 1 UCAS tariff point, using 9-1 scale with key partner school			