

Harper Adams University Access and participation plan

2020-21 to 2024-25

1. Assessment of performance

1. The mission of Harper Adams University is to provide, 'World leading higher education and research for the delivery of sustainable food chains and rural economies'. Our vision 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.'

We ask that the OfS considers the established Government Policy of 'rural proofing'¹ 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 considered.

2. At the time of writing (April 2019), the University has 2,550 undergraduate students actively studying on predominantly full-time sandwich programmes, of whom about 91% are home / EU students. We offer First degree and Foundation Degree programmes at the University's single rural campus, based on a working farm 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. We are equi-distant (23 miles) from three large universities that are located in more urban settings, which have wider subject coverage and which recruit large numbers of local students. We recruit students nationally and internationally to our specialist curriculum, with only 2% considered 'local' by the OfS and with 75% of our students in 'domicile to study' quintiles 4-5 i.e. the longest distances travelled to study from student homes². Our subject base covers agriculture, agri-business, agricultural engineering, animal wellbeing, applied zoology, countryside and environment, food production and supply-chain, land and property management and veterinary related subjects. We have permissive entry requirements, are considered a low tariff institution by UCAS based on A level points³ and have admitted 36% students with vocational qualifications on to both Foundation Degrees and Honours Degrees in the 2016-2018 entry years. From 2020/21, we will also run a joint veterinary medicine programme in conjunction with Keele University through the Harper and Keele Veterinary School (HKVetS).
3. In setting out our commitments to widen access and support student success and progression, we are aware 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 and the OfS teaching related grant is less than the combined income that we received from HEFCE's teaching grant and student fees prior to the 2012 entry. 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 the UK's agri-food chain and rural economies thrive in a global context. In meeting this challenge to provide New Talent for the economies we serve, at our 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 Access and Participation Plan (APP) sets out how we aim to achieve this ambition.

¹ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. 2017. *Rural proofing: Practical guidance to assess impacts of policies on rural areas*. March 2017 online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-proofing> [accessed 23rd April 2019]

² OfS, TEF subject pilot, provider level data. February 2019.

³ Personal communication, UCAS Relationship Manager, April 2019

4. There are no statistically significant gaps (at the 95% confidence interval level) across the whole five-year duration of the OfS's APP data set for any of the success or progression measures, although natural variations year-to-year have resulted in occasional differences within an individual year. We have therefore supplemented an analysis of the OfS APP data set with a review of our internal data, some of which is more current than the OfS data. We routinely use this data set to evaluate the impact of our interventions to date so that we can prioritise and refine work plans. We have been considering student access, success and progression by student characteristics for several years at both institutional and course suite level for our full-time undergraduate programmes, in line with our ambition to improve access from learners from low participation neighbourhoods. This goes together with our aim that no student group underperforms the overall mean by more than 3 percentage points on any success or progression measure, as agreed in our previous Plan and as reviewed by our Academic Board. Our internal success and progression measures are as follows: end of year retention; first year mean marks; attainment of either an upper second or first class Honours Degree, or Distinction or Merit Foundation Degree; progression to employment or further study; and progression to highly skilled employment or further study. We routinely consider the following student characteristics across access, success and progression: sex; age; POLAR; disability; ethnicity; urban/rural background; vocational entry qualifications; and the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). Small student cohort sizes (three-year mean of 630 entrants) mean that just a few students can influence performance measures, especially when data is disaggregated into sub-groups.
5. Despite our reservations about relying on area-based measures of disadvantage for rural students (paragraph 6), we recently stopped analysing individualised SLC verified household income data. This was because we identified: (1) no success or progression performance gaps based on income and; (2) as set out in paragraph 6, household income has not proven to be a stable indicator of disadvantage for rural workers. We also note the absence of the NS-SEC for individualised assessment of access disadvantage in the OfS APP data set and its removal from the HESA access PI set. The performance of Harper Adams on this HESA PI was materially and significantly above the sector mean, reflecting our high numbers of students from farm worker families. To date, we have used this measure in our internal analyses of comparability of outcomes and our Academic Board has been reassured that there have been no success or progression gaps to date. It is likely that we will remove it for future internal analyses. Accordingly, we have not included an additional assessment by NS-SEC in this narrative.

1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

Access

6. Our land-based specialism results in a predominantly national, rural catchment. Typically, around 80% of our new entrants declare themselves as from a rural background whilst postcode analysis of home addresses indicates 72% have an ONS classified rural postcode (18% nationally), with 37% resident in the 'most isolated hamlets and sparse settings' (4% nationally)⁴. Rural researchers consider that there is no ideal measure of rural disadvantage, including the English Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 (IMD), and so we are clear that area-based assessments need cautious treatment⁵. The Bridge Group⁶ also supports the need for a national body to improve the evidence base in relation to rural isolation, 'sense of place' and progression to higher education, following the closure of the Commission for Rural Communities. Household income as a measure of disadvantage also presents difficulties as we have experience of students from rural, and in particular agricultural, backgrounds being subject to highly fluctuating annual household incomes, based on the volatility of agricultural output prices, support measures and farm incomes. 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

⁴ Harper Adams analysis of output area data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). For a summary see, for example: Defra . 2017. The 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas in England. January 2017. Online at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591462/RUCOA_leaflet_Jan2017.pdf

⁵ **Burke, A., Jones, A.** 2019. The development of an index of rural deprivation: A case study of Norfolk, England. *Social Science & Medicine*. Vol 227, 93-103, online at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953618305094> [accessed 23rd April 2019]

⁶ **Bridge Group.** 2019. The influence of place: Geographical isolation and progression to higher education. February 2019, online at: <https://thebridgegroup.org.uk/research-and-policy/geographical-isolation/> [accessed 23rd April 2019]

or who work close to either side of the ‘farm gate’ within the food chain. Using 2009/10 as a base year, in the seven years thereafter, we saw variation ranging from -36% to +43%. Area based categorisations such as POLAR do not always reflect dimensions of rural disadvantage, as identified in the Social Mobility Commission’s ‘*State of the Nation 2017*’ report⁷, including the problem that small pockets of disadvantage are subsumed into larger, rural geographical areas for classification purposes. Thus, there is no ideal, single measure by which to gauge planned improvements in access. Given these limitations, we intend to complement the POLAR4 area classification with the IMD indicator of socio-economic advantage. At present, these offer the only practical basis for us to measure the impact of our contributions to improving social mobility and reaching the New Talent our industries need. We believe that, in the longer term, POLAR4 and IMD measures will continue to be less than ideal when addressing access and participation for students from rural backgrounds, that there is a need to ensure that future policy on access and participation is ‘rural proofed’ and that our APP will continue to require consideration of the context of our operating environment. We therefore propose to produce a report for the OfS that summarises some of the measures that could improve upon the access and participation tools that are currently available. Drawing upon desk-based research the report will review why current indices of social deprivation do not adequately address disadvantage in rural areas and populations, alternative measures that could be used and, where relevant, the national policy changes that would be needed to provide access to those measures. We will engage with the OfS, at that point, to determine the steps that would be required to enable a new approach to measuring and reporting access and participation in rural areas to be developed.

7. Using the POLAR4 classification, just over 90% of all Q1 wards and 78% of Q2 wards are categorised as urban. There are six pockets of rural wards that are Q1 but their locations are extremely distant and dispersed from our single campus in Shropshire; five of the six are coastal locations (with average drive times of 201 minutes, compared to 136 minutes for all our applicants in the 2018 entry cycle, and 132 minutes for those who accepted a place⁸). This affects our ability to attract students from households in those areas that are categorised as low participation, as POLAR4 Q1 neighbourhoods are overwhelmingly urban. In preparing this Plan, we have established that this situation is replicated for IMD postcodes. Our specialist, applied curriculum and our remote rural location are particularly attractive to rural-based learners. However, in seeking to provide New Talent for the economies we serve, we anticipate a further increase in enrolments from urban backgrounds in line with our new outreach programme, contextualised admissions programme and modestly extended curriculum. Accordingly, we believe that our work to support those from under-represented neighbourhoods will have most impact if we focus efforts on increasing enrolments from both the Q1 and Q2 groups, rather than solely Q1. Our recent access record using the POLAR4 measure is set out in Table 1.

Table 1 Proportion of student enrolments from POLAR4 Q1-2 groups on to full-time undergraduate programmes, and absolute gaps

Measure	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (internal data)	Change
% Q1-Q2	13.7	14.1	14.8	15.1	16.3	+2.6pp
Gap Q3-5:1-2	72.6	71.8	70.3	69.8	67.4	-5.2pp

⁷ Social Mobility Commission. 2017. *State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain*, p. v

⁸ UCAS PERS 2018, End of Cycle data set

8. Recent outreach work, including our work in partnership with the Higher Horizons+ (Uni Connect) formerly known as National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), and changes to our admissions practices resulted in positive changes at +2.0% over four years up to 2018/19 (slightly above the most recent five year improvement for the sector at 1.1% up to 2017/18, the baseline year for the creation of this plan). Application data reviewed by our Academic Board highlighted a slow increase in applications from POLAR4 Q1-2 applicants up to 20.8%, against an enrolment rate of 15.7% in 2018/19. This data exposes an applicant to enrolment rate gap of -5% points. Whilst we are a UCAS low tariff provider, a disproportionate number of our POLAR4 Q1-2 applicants applied with weak GCSEs and did not satisfy our normal entry requirements. These applicants were also most likely to apply to our most over-subscribed courses, with PSRB accreditation requirements. Whilst we must be confident that admitted students will succeed, we believe there is some scope to consider marginally weaker GCSE and level 3 performance for POLAR4 Q1-2 applicants, who we judge have probably faced disadvantage in their level 2 and level 3 studies. We believe selective contextualised offer making should help us to close the application to offer rate gap, which was -11% points for these applicants when compared with the overall rate. We do not believe it realistic to close this gap entirely, given students will be admitted only if we are confident that, with reasonable levels of additional support, they will succeed on-course. Some of our outreach work includes attainment-raising programmes, as set out in Table 16. Limited applicant feedback has indicated that for a small number of potential POLAR4 Q1-2 students, some of our interview and pre-entry work experience requirements might present a potential barrier that we will continue to work to determine and, if required, overcome.

9. The problem of low progression rates from school to HEI's amongst white, 'working class' males is well documented, including by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)⁹. Whilst there has to be a recognition that the barriers to attainment (and, thus, progression) for this group are complex and unlikely to be overcome by Higher Education Providers alone, the predominance of this group in our region means that they must remain a key target and active engagement with schools is key to this. A central feature of Harper Adams' approach is to build strategic partnerships and programmes of engagement and interventions over time, using POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 and school Free School Meal rates as indicators of 'working class'. Subsequent work from NEON and the Bridge Group¹⁰ recommends an equal focus on 'working class' males and females. Despite our rural mission, our focused curriculum, the predominantly rural geographical backgrounds of most applicants and the campus's remote, rural location, our recent experiences give us real confidence that we can continue to progressively increase enrolments for students from Q1-2 postcodes through a combination of our outreach work, revised admissions practices and slightly extended curriculum.

10. In considering the limitations of all the area-based proxies for socio-economic disadvantage, we have compared the IMD and POLAR4 classifications of individuals and noted variations such that only 8% of enrolled students, and for whom there is data for both measures (83%), featured in Q1-2 for each of the two indicators, despite five-year mean enrolment rates of 14.4% and 15.4% for POLAR4 and IMD postcodes, respectively. Under half (45%) of our POLAR4 Q1-2 enrolments are also IMD Q1-2 and under two-thirds (59%) of our IMD Q1-2 enrolments are also POLAR4 Q1-2. This analysis reinforces the need for us to use the two measures of socio-economic disadvantage. Table 2 summarises our access record using IMD as a measure, given that we intend to use both measures in our determination to work to improve access for those from less advantaged socio-economic groups and believe targeting interventions using both measures will help us do so more effectively than relying solely on just one imperfect measure.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Atherton, G & Mazhari, T. 2019. *Working Class Heroes: understanding access to higher education for white students from lower socio-economic backgrounds*. National Education Opportunities Network.

Table 2 Proportion of student enrolments from IMD Q1-2 groups on to full-time undergraduate programmes, and absolute gaps

Measure	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (internal data)	Change
% Q1-Q2	15.9	16.2	14.0	15.8	13.8	-2.1
Gap Q3-5:1-2	68.3	67.6	71.9	68.5	72.4	+4.1

Despite our pleasing progress with increasing POLAR4 Q1-2 enrolment rates observed in Table 1, following our targeted outreach work, this is not the case for IMD Q1-2 enrolments. We will work to better understand the different geographical locations in the planning of targeted outreach and promotional activities, so that we can reach more disadvantaged learners. Accordingly, in the future, we will also import IMD (2015 or successor) data into our student record for analysis of access, success and progression rates in order to incorporate the measure into our assessments and plans.

Success

Non-continuation

11. In reviewing the OfS data set in the five years up to 2016/17 entry, there were no consistently statistically significant gaps in continuation rates for students based on their POLAR4 status, nor are there any other characteristics of disadvantage such as free school meals nor IMD status for which there is a consistently statistically significant gap. Whilst any material gaps are not statistically significant, in four out of the five years of OfS APP data, the POLAR4 Q1 students observed the lowest retention rate of each quintile group, as shown in Table 3, with gaps ranging between 2 to 15 percentage points between Q1 and Q5 students. Accordingly, these students will remain a focus of on-course intervention work for review by course teams and Academic Board.

12. Consideration of internal year 1 retention data for 2017/18 entrants identified that fewer than ten students from a total entry of 36 POLAR4 Q1 enrolments did not complete their first year studies. This was predominantly because of self-withdrawal rather than academic failure, although the gap was in line with those seen in Table 3 (OfS data) and was six points worse than the institutional mean. This highlights the difference two students can make with small cohorts. The Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee routinely considers in-year self-withdrawal and the self-declared reasons for such, including special student groups. In-year monitoring enables us to identify early signals of the need for further action. The retention of Q1 and Q2 students, combined, was in line with the institutional year 1 retention rate, as has been the case since 2015/16, confirming that the Q1 group is that which requires focus in supporting continuation rates.

Table 3 Full-time undergraduate student continuation rates by POLAR4 quintile, percentage continuation rates

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Q1	91	88	80	84	88	+4	-3
Q2	94	92	88	95	93	-2	-1
Q3	88	90	92	92	96	+4	+6
Q4	94	93	91	96	95	-1	+1
Q5	93	91	95	95	93	0	-2
Q1-Q5 gap	-2	-3	-15	-9	-5	+4	-3
Q1-2 & Q3-5 split gap	+1	-2	-8	-3	-3	0	-4

13. As set out in paragraph 6, existing area-based classifications are not considered robust for rural inhabitants. The University has not, to date, routinely collected nor stored IMD data for individual students as the basis for assessing the extent to which there is differential performance. However, analysis of OfS APP data indicates that, for both males and females, continuation rates for those identified as IMD Q1-2 are generally lower than for Q3-5 and as set out for both sexes in Table 4. The IMD data displays slightly larger gaps than with the POLAR4 analysis although one must be cautious over the small numbers and none of these gaps is statistically significant based on the confidence intervals used by the OfS. Accordingly, in the future, we will also analyse success and progression rates by IMD status, to inform our Success and Retention Plan interventions.

Table 4 Full-time all undergraduate student continuation rates by English IMD quintile, percentage continuation rates

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/5	2015/16	2016/17	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Q1	80	86	72	79	81	+2	+1
Q2	89	90	88	89	92	+3	+3
Q3	94	93	92	94	95	+1	+1
Q4	94	88	95	97	93	-4	-1
Q5	91	92	91	94	91	0	-3
Q1-Q5 gap	-11	-6	-19	-15	-10	+5	+1
Q1-2 & Q3-5 gap	-6	-2	-8	-9	-3	+6	+3

Attainment

14. No statistically significant gaps in attainment of higher Honours Degrees are apparent from analysis of the OfS APP data, as in Table 5. The absolute gap between the combined Q1-2 and Q3-5 groups is small when taken over the five-year period. The routine scrutiny of internal attainment has identified smaller Q1 gaps than the OfS APP data is suggesting, presumably because internal monitoring to date has utilised the POLAR3 classification. Whilst internal scrutiny had highlighted a negative gap for POLAR3 Q1 students historically, the Academic Board was pleased to observe the Q1 gap had been significantly reduced in 2017/18 so that it was within 3 percentage points of the overall, in line with our Success and Retention ambitions. We have identified the need to import POLAR4 data into the student record. This will enable us to assess the attainment levels of earlier enrolling graduates on the same basis as the OfS APP data set given that the two iterations of POLAR appear to present different levels of performance with attainment parity much more equal in 2018, using POLAR3 as opposed to POLAR4.

Table 5 Full-time, higher award Honours Degree attainment rates by POLAR4 quintile

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Q1	50	N	N	73	54	+1	+4
Q2	69	78	50	71	84	+13	+15
Q3	67	78	67	80	71	-9	+4
Q4	59	64	66	69	74	+5	+15
Q5	66	71	59	72	81	+9	+15
Q1-Q5 gap	-16	NA	NA	+1	-25	-26	-9
Q1-2 & Q3-5 gap	-1	+5	-6	-1	-3	-2	-2

15. Table 6 displays attainment data using the OfS APP data set. To date IMD indicators have not been used for internal assessments of performance. As in paragraph 13, further work will be undertaken so that IMD data provides another basis for assessing parity of outcomes, although Table 6 does not display any statistically significant gaps in attainment levels.

Table 6 Full-time, higher award Honours Degree attainment rates by English IMD quintile

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Q1	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Q2	63	78	50	70	77	+7	+14
Q3	67	74	69	75	79	+4	+12
Q4	68	70	63	69	79	+10	+11
Q5	62	70	65	75	80	+5	+18
Q1-Q5 gap	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Q1-2 & Q3-5 gap	-3	+1	-11	-10	-2	+8	+1

Progression to employment or further study

16. The OfS APP data highlights no consistent gaps based on POLAR4, as set out in Table 7 although there has been a marked improvement in employment outcomes for those from Q1, in particular, in line with our 'Becoming a Professional' and Development Trust (DT) careers programmes of work. POLAR4 Q1-2 students are disproportionately more likely to receive DT awards. Scrutiny of the OfS APP data highlights no statistically significant gaps and variations between cohorts in relation to negative or positive indicator differences for the more and less advantaged quintile groups based on IMD data.

Table 7 Progression to highly skilled employment or further study by POLAR4 groups

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Q1	50	33	R	N	74	N	+24
Q2	66	60	63	63	69	+6	+3
Q3	68	75	75	68	66	-2	-2
Q4	66	70	71	68	66	-2	0
Q5	64	70	72	70	66	-4	+2
Q1&Q5 gap	-14	-36	R	+8	+22	+14	+36
Q1-2 & Q3-5 gap	-6	-19	-15	-1	+5	+6	+11

17. Closer scrutiny of POLAR4 Q1-2 data by sex indicates a statistically significant positive gap for males in 2016/17 but a statistically significant negative gap for female leavers in 2013 and 2014. This apparent under-performance by females in some years (and a lower indicator rate in all years) is because of the distortion by the outdated classification of Veterinary Nursing employment as 'not professional or managerial'. This course area has the highest proportion of our Q1 and Q2 students who are predominantly female and, across three years, 95% 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 the mean for all students, once the incorrect classification of veterinary nursing had been corrected in relation to highly skilled employment¹¹.

1.2 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Minority students**Access**

18. Harper Adams University has not attracted high numbers of applicants from British Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds because of its rurally focused curriculum and rural location. The OfS data set indicates that the five-year mean for BAME enrolments was 1.1% of the total. This equates to 8-12 students per intake. The majority of our students are from rural backgrounds intent on entering a career in the rural economy and classified as 'rural residents' in the ONS output areas system, in which only 1.5% of the population is BAME. For all Agriculture subject providers in England, Wales and Scotland, 2.4% of students in the subject were BAME, based on HEIDI data in 2017/18. Of the four UK land-

¹¹ The ONS has now recommended that for SOC2020, veterinary nursing will be categorised in major group 2, that is, as a professional occupation, as at this link: https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SOC2010_final_report_April_2019.docx [accessed 24th April 2019]

based specialists, 2017/18 HEIDI data reports the total undergraduate BAME population as 2.7%. The Office for National Statistics indicates that in the four calendar years 2015-2018, only 0.9-1.5% of agriculture, forestry and fisheries workers were BAME, compared to 11-12% of the entire UK workforce in the same period. Accordingly, whilst there is a large gap between our BAME enrolment rate and that for the sector (five-year rate of 29% according to OfS data), our rates are broadly consistent with our subject area, rural location and the rural backgrounds of most of our students. Nonetheless, we believe there is scope to improve this record further and are pleased to observe that our 2018/19 intake reached 2%, reflecting our most recent outreach work and curriculum extension.

19. Overall small numbers of BAME applicants mean that post-cycle UCAS offer rate data is still only available for mixed race applicants. 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. Continuation of our revised outreach strategy and work to target POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 applicants, including from urban areas, will enable us to encourage more BAME learners to consider a career in our specialist sector, and related fields, and so diversify our own industries with New Talent. Encouragingly, our application rates from those with BAME backgrounds have slowly increased as we have broadened our portfolio of courses and extended our outreach work, from an average of 1.6% of applications in the years up to 2010 to 3.0% in 2018. Our Academic Board has considered UCAS equality data, for which we are only provided with disaggregated data for white and mixed-race ethnicities, given small population sizes. For the 2018/19 entry, whilst 3% of our applicants were BAME, this converted to only 2% enrolments. We have established that the BAME offer rate was lower at 39% compared with 65% for white applicants. This is because BAME applicants were more likely to apply for our most over-subscribed veterinary-related courses (+12 point difference in application rate compared with white applicants), yet more likely to present with less strong A level predictions (-8 point difference) or a BTEC with weaker actual GCSE attainment (-19 point difference). Whilst ethnicity specifically cannot be used as a basis for contextualised offer making (as UCAS ethnicity data is invisible to providers until enrolment), plans to take account of school performance, alongside POLAR4 data is likely to increase the offer rate to BAME students, including for our new veterinary medicine provision, through our Access to Harper contextualised offer programme.
20. We believe we can develop a cost-effective, bespoke programme of work, with a view to increase our BAME application and enrolment rate, so the latter is higher than the rural population and rural workforce. In doing so, we hope to attract new and diverse talent for the industries we serve. This will be achievable through our outreach programme in schools, our contextualised offer making in relation to school attainment and POLAR4 status, and our extended curriculum. Our aims have been shaped by a realistic appraisal of what is achievable within the context of our specialist mission and our geographic location, and with limited outreach access to schools with significant populations of BAME students. Whilst modest in absolute terms, the work will seek to take us to a point that challenges BAME representation in rural life and professions.

Success

21. As with access data, the small BAME population makes disaggregation and publication of data insecure, even when aggregated over three years as we do for BAME for internal monitoring purposes.

Non-continuation

22. The OfS APP data is non-reportable given the small numbers of BAME students in any one cohort on full-time undergraduate courses. However, comparison of white student continuation with all students indicates that over a five-year period, our BAME student continuation in HE was better than for white students in four of the five years. However, internal year 1 retention, as opposed to continuation in HE, data considered by our Academic Board allows us to observe that over a three-year time period, six of 31 BAME students did not complete their first year, either because of self-withdrawal or on academic grounds. This resulted in a three-year retention rate of 81% compared with a white student retention rate of 90% across Honours and Foundation Degrees. Accordingly, whilst there is no continuation rate gap, there appears to be cause to pay attention to year 1 retention in

studies at Harper Adams, especially taking account of the reasons given for self-withdrawal. Reasons given for BAME students leaving early are typically personal but we are clear that we need to do more to ensure that students who are in a very small ethnic minority do not feel isolated and that they should be comfortable that they fit in socially with other students and staff. Our Respect Campaign ensures that the voices of BAME students feature strongly in the Campaign's plans to ensure that our entire community, whether from rural or urban backgrounds and of whatever politics, sex, ethnicity or sexuality, and other personal characteristics, feels valued and that all have an equal sense of belonging. Eradication of any negative sense of minority for BAME students is also likely to encourage increased levels of applications and acceptances from those BAME students who aspire to a career in our industries. A planned audit of the curriculum in relation to inclusive culture content is likely to support this work and, in practising universal curriculum design principles, all our students are likely to benefit.

Attainment

23. As with non-continuation, the OfS APP ethnicity data is largely unreportable due to small cohort sizes at a disaggregated level. However, comparison of white students with all students indicates that BAME students have performed the same as or better than white students in three of the five years of data. This assessment is confirmed by consideration of the internal data aggregated over three years which, although it indicated a lower proportion on higher level Honours Degrees awarded to BAME students, in 2018 proportionately more BAME than white students were awarded a higher level classification. Accordingly, we do not believe that our currently small cohort of BAME students display an attainment gap, and that attainment is broadly equal.

Progression to employment or further study

24. As with success factors, the OfS APP data is largely unreportable at a disaggregated level because of small cohort sizes. However, comparison of white students and all students indicates that BAME students have performed either the same or very slightly better than white students in progressing to positive outcomes (in the range of 65-69% to highly skilled employment, across the five years of OfS APP data). Whilst our specific programme to target BAME students for career development mentoring was not welcomed by our small population of BAME students and thus withdrawn, our 'Becoming a Professional' programme has enjoyed BAME student participation and we plan to continue this provision.

1.3 Mature students

Access

25. Table 8 sets out our access record by age at entry. Our five-year full-time mature (21+) enrolment rate mean is 11%, which compares with a five-year sector mean of 27%.

Table 8 Proportion of full-time all undergraduate enrolments by age at entry, and absolute gaps

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (internal data)	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Young, <21	92.7	89.7	88.2	88.8	87.1	-1.7	-5.6
Mature, 21+	7.3	10.3	11.8	11.2	12.9	+1.7	+5.6
Gap	85.4	79.4	76.4	77.6	74.2	-3.4	-11.2

26. Table 9 sets out enrolments by age on our part-time regulated provision. This constitutes just 5% of the total in headcount terms and so for most characteristics there is no reportable OfS APP data. Our specialist part-time regulated provision is especially attractive to mature students since it is organised on a flexible and block delivery basis and links directly to employer or PSRB professional development expectations. This provision attracts students over the entire age ranges, although is operated on a much smaller scale than the full-time undergraduate provision.

Table 9 Proportion of all part-time undergraduate enrolments by age at entry, and absolute gaps

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Young, < 21	0	0	11	9	6	-3	+6
Mature, 21+	100	100	89	91	94	+3	-6
Gap	100	100	78	82	88	+6	-12

27. The vast majority of our mature students study with us on a part-time basis on unregulated low volume programmes, mainly with employer sponsorship, and not reflected in the OfS data set. Over the course of 2017/18, there were 2,616 part-time students engaged in low volume, workforce development programmes, of which many are delivered partly off-site. We consider our record very good in supporting the HE study needs of mature learners. Our experience of working with mature learners, in support of their career aspirations, is that many wish to study part-time, at very low intensity levels of learning on a flexible and block basis, often close to work, rather than committing to full-time studies. Accordingly, when taking account of all our undergraduate level provision in both modes, we have no plans to increase our enrolment rate of mature students, as on a headcount basis, in 2017/18, mature student enrolments accounted for 53% of the total, albeit most were on very low volumes of study on unregulated programmes. We offer degree apprenticeships on a block delivery basis although without the same level of 'roll-on, roll-off' flexibility as our other part-time programmes, in line with sponsoring employer requirements. Monitoring of apprenticeship enrolment data will, indicates a more diverse intake than for our full-time provision.

Success

Non-continuation

28. The OfS APP data set identifies that in three of the five years up to 2016/17, a negative continuation rate gap for 21-25 year old mature students is statistically significant when compared with young starters. Table 10 shows data for all mature students and whilst there are material differences, they are statistically significant in 2013/14 only. Internal three-year data up to 2017/18 on year 1 retention rates, previously considered by Academic Board, indicates that mature students self-withdrew at an aggregate rate of 11% compared with 7% for young students and failed at an aggregate rate of 4% when compared with 3% for young students. Thus, the mature student three-year aggregated internal retention rate up to 2017/18 was 84% compared with 90% for all students. We put measures in place, as part of our Success and Retention Plan, to support a mature student social network in 2017/18, as feedback indicated that some older students felt socially isolated in a predominantly young environment. This network grew in 2018/19 with students taking more initiative to sustain the network's activities. The year 1 internal retention rate in 2017/18 improved to 89%, compared with 92% for all students, in line with our aim to have no more than a 3-point gap for any group.

Table 10 Continuation rates for full-time undergraduates by age at entry

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Young, <21	92	91	92	94	94	0	+4
Mature, 21+	91	77	78	89	86	-3	-5
Young – mature gap	-1	-14*	-14	-5	-8	-3	-2

* denotes statistically significant at the 95% CI level.

29. Accordingly, we believe we need to continue our work as part of our Success and Retention Plan in order to maintain the internal retention rate of mature students so that it is broadly in line with that of young students, as in 2017/18. Where mature students do express the wish

to self-withdraw, they are counselled to meet with a Careers Advisor with a view to identifying alternative routes through Higher Education, including with other providers.

Attainment

30. The OfS APP data set highlights year-to-year volatility in the attainment rates for young and mature students with each group outperforming the other in two of the five years and exhibiting identical performance in one year. Only in one year was the gap statistically significant and in the favour of mature learners. Internal data reported to Academic Board supports this assessment for the last three years and indicated that the attainment of each group is within 3 points, confirming there is no attainment gap.

Progression to employment or further study

31. The OfS APP data indicates that in one year from five (2014/15) there was a statistically significant negative gap in progression outcomes for mature students and in two years there was a positive material gap for mature students. We have noted that mature students are most engaged in our 'Becoming a Professional', Development Trust and enterprise development programmes, as well as individualised careers service support. Internal data presented to Academic Board indicates higher levels of positive outcomes for mature students than does the OfS APP data and that mature students outperform younger students to a modest degree (by around 4 points over the three years up to 2016/17). Accordingly, in advance of the next round of internal monitoring, there is a need to reconcile the two data sets to ensure that base populations are comparable. Notwithstanding the need for this data-checking work, there is no progression gap for mature students.

1.4 Disabled students

Access

32. The OfS APP data for Harper Adams is in Table 11. Disabled access arrangements at Harper Adams are sector leading, with enrolment rates above benchmark and consistently in the top ten of all providers, based on HESA PIs. The OfS APP data indicates a 20% five-year mean enrolment rate for Harper Adams when compared with a sector rate of 13%. We believe this is because of the effort that our learner support, accommodation and admissions teams make in ensuring that we are welcoming of all those with a disability, through the provision of advice and guidance throughout the pre-applicant and applicant journey. We have observed an increase in students with poor mental health and with complex multiple impairments, often incorporating mental health and social and communication disorders.

Table 11 Full-time undergraduate student enrolment percentage rates by disability, and absolute gaps

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
No disability	83	79	79	79	79	0	-4
Disability of which:	17	21	21	21	21	0	+4
Cognitive and learning	14.6	17.4	17.5	17.3	15.6	-1.7	+1.0
Mental health	0.2	0.8	0.3	0.1	1.3	+1.2	+0.9
Sensory, medical and physical	1.2	1.7	1.3	1.3	0.9	-0.4	-0.3
Multiple	1.1	0.6	1.8	2.1	3.2	+2.2	+2.1
Social and communication	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.5	-0.1	+0.3
Gap	65.6	58.4	58.1	57.1	57.0	-0.1	-8.6

Success

33. Whilst numbers of students with more complex needs have increased, the absolute numbers remain too low for disaggregation and external reporting purposes in relation to performance

gaps and, other than for cognitive and learning disorders, have been rounded to no more than 10 in the OfS APP data set.

Non-continuation

34. The OfS APP data highlights no statistically significant gaps in the continuation rates of disabled students, with between-year variations as in Table 12. Internal year 1 retention monitoring data routinely considered by Academic Board for 2017/18 also observed a rate for disabled students within 0.1 points of able-bodied students at 93% retention. There is currently no continuation gap for disabled students, despite the increasing numbers of students with more complex needs. The data is pleasing in that it provides testament to the effectiveness of our learner support, mental health, wellbeing and inclusive practice arrangements over recent years, including staff development and initiatives progressed through our Success and Retention Plan. This work will continue so we maintain this excellent record.

Table 12 Continuation rates for full-time undergraduates by disability status

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Able bodied	93	90	92	94	93	-1	0
Disabled	89	90	87	93	93	0	+4
Gap for disability	-4	0	-5	-1	0	+1	+4

Attainment

35. The OfS APP data highlights no statistically significant gaps in attainment for disabled students compared with able-bodied students, although the material level of performance for disabled students has been several points below that for able-bodied students in the three most recent years as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 Attainment rates for full-time undergraduates by disability status

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Able bodied	64	71	66	73	77	+4	+13
Disabled	68	71	55	66	71	+3	+3
Gap for disability	+4	0	-11	-7	-6	+1	-3

36. Although there are no statistically significant attainment gaps for all disabled students, in 2015/16 there was a statistically significant negative gap for those with cognitive and learning difficulties. This reinforces the need for us to continue to monitor attainment levels, including in relation to the levels of inclusivity within undergraduate curricula. Other than for this one year (2015/16), attainment of higher Honours Degree rates of those with cognitive and learning difficulties and able-bodied students has been within 3 points of each other and so there is no consistent disability attainment gap. OfS APP data and the internal data reported to Academic Board has, however, noted a three-year negative differential for all disabled students when compared with able-bodied students which is outside our 3-point tolerance, even though year-on-year improvements have been observed since the poorest performing cohort in 2015/16. Thus, we to need to continue to pay attention to our work to give disabled students an equal chance of high levels of attainment.

Progression to employment or further study

37. The OfS APP data highlights no statistically significant gaps in positive employment outcomes between all disabled and able-bodied students, although the disabled group has tended to display a materially larger progression to highly skilled employment or further study as set out in Table 14. We believe that our support for students both on campus and whilst on placement, through the learner support, academic guidance and wellbeing teams, alongside the close working relationships between the Careers Service and Placement Office with those teams, which are all co-located, ensures that there is no disabled student progression gap. These teams also support disabled students in applying for Development Trust awards and, accordingly, they have a success rate in line with their enrolment rate.

Table 14 Progression to highly skilled employment or further study by disability status

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
Able bodied	64	67	67	71	66	-5	+2
Disabled	68	77	77	58	68	+10	0
Gap for disability	+2	+10	+10	-13	+2	+15	0

1.5 Care leavers

Access

38. Over recent years, we have enrolled only 1-4 care leavers annually, and whilst our total population has increased each year from 2016/17, it is still below the poor, but disputed, sector-wide care leaver enrolment rate of 6-15%¹². The 2018/19 entry year saw our highest enrolment level to date. We work collaboratively with other Higher Education providers to encourage looked after children to consider HE options as a route to improve their life chances. We believe our below-sector enrolment rate is largely because of our specialist curriculum and our rural location that is not easily accessible by public transport, although the University does provide heavily subsidised local transport to the adjacent town for all students. When we prepared this plan we observed care leaver applications that are rejected because of poor GCSEs and level 3 predicted grades, hence their inclusion in our Access to Harper contextualised offer programme. We will also continue to work with the Become charity to promote the support available at Harper Adams through our own webpages and through its 'Propel' website. We will continue to work with our partners on collaborative outreach programmes to encourage care leavers to progress to higher education. We have signed the Care Leavers' Covenant. This should provide reassurance to any care leavers interested in our subject areas that they will receive active support to succeed at Harper Adams.

Success

39. Given the tiny numbers of students involved, we have not routinely considered the success or progression rates of care leavers in open meetings although the Wellbeing team is alert to emerging problems such as poor attendance and liaises with course tutors as required to identify if intervention is needed and how it will be managed. We are conscious of the additional challenges that care leavers face. Accordingly, we provide year-round first year residential accommodation if requested, prioritise care leavers for residential accommodation beyond first year, on request and in line with the Care Leavers' Covenant, and include care leavers within our broader interventions in support of student success, including the use of nudging actions. We do have experience of care leavers requesting that their care leaver status be removed from their personal record as they believed that they needed no support beyond that given to other students and we respect such requests once students have been counselled on the way such data is used.

Progression to employment or further study

40. As with measures of success, tiny data sets make publication of progression outcome data insecure although we have monitored such to inform our own advice and guidance practice in relation to nudging actions. 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, including the 'Becoming a Professional' and Development Trust programmes of information, advice guidance and support and the Midlands Challenge leadership programme.

1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

White, working class males

¹² Harrison, N. 2019. Patterns of participation in higher education for care-experienced students in England: why has there not been more progress?, *Studies in Higher Education*, DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2019.1582014](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1582014): online at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1582014> [accessed 26th April 2019]

Access

41. The OfS APP data highlights the declining number of 'white, working class boys' for us and contrasts with the increases in 'white, working class girls', using POLAR4 Q1-2 to define 'working class'. This decline reflects a five-year decline in all male enrolments, although is a proportionately greater decline for the Q1-2 group (-18% for Q3-5 males and -45% for Q1-2 males, within an overall male decline of -23%), following the introduction of programmes which have attracted greater interest from females, including those from disadvantaged postcodes. Conversely, the absolute five-year growth in Q3-5 female enrolments is less than it is for females from the POLAR4 Q1-2 group (+9% for Q3-4 females and +33% for the Q1-2 group, within an overall female increase of 10%). Similar differential changes are not observable for females using the IMD 1-2 quintiles as a measure of disadvantage. However, the access gap for POLAR4 Q1-2 males with their POLAR4 Q3-5 counterparts has reduced over the last five years, as shown in Table 15 below. Analysis indicates that there has been a similar access gap reduction for males using the IMD measure. Our planned access interventions are intended to increase access for Q1-2 students of both sexes.

Table 15 Proportion of full-time all undergraduate male enrolments of total, and absolute gaps, by POLAR4 Quintile

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (internal)	Change 1 year	Change 5 years
% Q1-2 males	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.6	4.2	-0.4	-0.5
% Q3-5 males	43.3	41.0	37.7	32.4	32.6	+0.2	-10.7
Gap between POLAR4 Q1-2 and Q3-5 males	38.6	36.5	33.1	27.8	28.4	-0.6	-10.2

Success

Continuation

42. Internal review of male retention for our Foundation Degree students in 2016/17 identified a gap outside our tolerance limit of 3 points. This is also observable in the OfS APP continuation data for Year 5. Pleasingly, in line with our Success and Retention Plan work, all male retention was within 2 points of that for females in 2017/18. The OfS APP data highlights no statistically significant gaps for POLAR4 Q1-2 males and material gaps are within 2 points for three years, leading us to the conclusion that there are no continuation gaps for white, working class males.

Attainment

43. The OfS APP data highlights no statistical differences in attainment between male POLAR4 Q1-2 and Q3-5 groups and any material differences larger than 2 points are in favour of Q1-2 students. Whilst there are no statistically significant gaps between IMD Q1-2 and IMD 3-5 males, there are negative material gaps above 10 points in three of the five years for IMD Q1-2 students, resulting in a five-year aggregated negative gap of -6.6% points. Additionally, internal data has been reinforced by the OfS APP data that highlights a statistically significant negative attainment gap for all males compared with females in four out of five years (at -13%). This prompts the need to develop a general male attainment development plan, to explore the underlying reasons for this relatively poor male attainment, with a view to taking remedial action in identifying and removing any barriers for this wider group, and, in so doing, supporting under-represented or disadvantaged males to higher levels of attainment.

Progression to highly skilled employment or further study

44. Internal data has consistently confirmed that males and females progress to highly skilled employment or further study at similar rates, although the rate for females, and in particular POLAR Q1-2 females, has been artificially depressed because of the inaccurate historic SOC coding for veterinary nurses. The OfS APP data suggests there has been a five-year statistically significant improvement in male POLAR4 Q1-2 progression outcomes, yet a statistically significant deterioration in male IMD Q1-2 progression outcomes, largely because of outlying data in years 1 and 5, which flagged a positive IMD Q1-2 gap in 2012/13 and a positive POLAR Q1-2 gap in 2016/17. Accordingly, we believe that there is no male, working class progression gap.

1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

BTEC / vocational qualification entrants

45. Students with vocational qualifications, in particular BTEC awards, are not as well represented in many universities as they are at Harper Adams University. Changes to secondary education have resulted in higher applications and, thus enrolments from, students with BTEC qualifications, predominantly within low and medium tariff universities. We have observed an increase in the proportion of students entering with at least one vocational qualification (sometimes combined with an A level) from 18% to 36% in 2018, with a peak of 39% in 2017. Our analysis has also identified that students entering with BTEC qualifications are more likely to be from under-represented or disadvantaged groups, including displaying one or more of the following characteristics: mature, disabled, POLAR Q1/Q2, care leaver or BAME background. 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, as has been recognised through the OfS Successful Outcomes Premium Fund algorithms in relation to 'at risk' students. In 2016, our Academic Board observed that BTEC entrants presented a three-year retention rate gap of -7.6%, compared with all students. We recognised this position several years ago and our interventions to support BTEC students, but also ensure teaching is universally more accessible, over recent years resulted in year-on-year improvements and a three-year mean gap up to 2018 at -3.2% and -2% in 2017/18. The latest internal review of progression outcomes to employment and professional and managerial employment highlights apparently weaker BTEC outcomes although these are depressed by the incorrect SOC coding for vet nurses. Accordingly, our intervention work through our Academic Guidance Tutor programme focuses on vocationally qualified students who are more likely to engage in support programmes on that basis rather than other, more sensitive, personal characteristics. We will be alert to the impact on students' preparedness for their HE studies following changes made to BTEC curricula over the early part of this Plan. We will also ensure that we take account of proposed T-level qualifications as more information becomes available.

2 Strategic aims and objectives

2.1 Target groups

Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

46. When this plan was written we judged the following based on our assessment of performance at paragraphs 6-17:

- There is a need to continue to challenge ourselves to increase enrolments of both female and male students from both POLAR4 and IMD Q1-2, drawing on our recent outreach and admissions work.
- There is a need to continue with our retention work and stretching attainment ambitions that no group displays outlying under-performance by more than 3 percentage points, paying particular attention to POLAR4 Q1 and IMD Q1, including in-year consideration of the characteristics of early leavers. We have good employment outcomes for all students, in particular those from POLAR4 Q1-2, studying Veterinary Nursing which is now recognised as a highly skilled occupation.
- There is a need to augment the characteristics of disadvantage used internally when analysing on-course success and progression to include the English IMD, with a view to identify the need for, and take, remedial action where necessary.
- We will continue to highlight to policy makers the need for a rural index of deprivation that better represents disadvantage in rural areas than existing area-based measures, and which would enable us and other land-based providers to set ambitious context-specific targets.
- In order to align with the OfS data set, there is a need to import POLAR4 data to replace the POLAR3 data that UCAS has provided institutions with until May 2019 as part of the applicant record. Accordingly, we will focus our attention on:
 - Increasing the proportion of full-time undergraduate entrants from POLAR4 and IMD Q1-2 postcodes.

- Improving year 1 retention rates for students from POLAR4 Q1 and IMD Q1 so that they are consistently within a challenging 3 points of the retention rate for all students.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicities

47. We have judged the following based on our assessment of performance at paragraphs 18-24:

- We believe there is scope to increase the enrolment rate of BAME students and diversify the source of New Talent for the industries that we serve, beyond that observed in rural communities and economy.
- The Success and Retention Plan and associated Respect Campaign should improve the sense of belonging amongst minority groups, including those from BAME ethnicities, and ensure that internal retention and, thus, continuation rates for ethnic minority students are on a par with white students.
- There is no BAME attainment gap.
- There is no BAME progression gap. Accordingly, our focus will be on:
 - Increasing the enrolment rate of BAME students by 2024/25.
 - Improving year 1 retention rates for BAME students so that they are consistently within an ambitious 3 points of the retention rate for all students.

Mature students

48. We have judged the following based on our assessment of performance at paragraphs 25-31:

- We have a large mature student population studying on part-time, flexible and predominantly low volume programmes, largely sponsored by employers. We believe we make a positive contribution to these groups of learners on largely unregulated provision, in advancing their careers and have no specific plans to extend our curriculum delivery arrangements beyond those already in place in order to increase mature student enrolments further.
- We need to continue our ambitions within our Success and Retention Plan, to support more full-time, mature learners to continue with their studies at Harper Adams.
- There is no mature student attainment gap.
- There is no mature student progression gap, although our 'Becoming a Professional', Enterprise and Development Trust programmes need to continue in order to maintain this position. Accordingly, our focus will be on:
 - Improving year 1 retention rates for mature students so that they are consistently within a stretching 3 point of the retention rate for all students.

Disabled students

49. We have judged the following based on our assessment of performance at paragraphs 32-37:

- We enrol large numbers of students with a disability, consistently above the sector level, and have observed more students enrolling who face greater challenges and have more complex needs.
- There is no disabled student retention or continuation gap.
- We need to continue our ambitions within the Success and Retention Plan to ensure that those with a disability have access to inclusive teaching practice, supported by principles of universal design, readily available learning technologies and first-rate individualised support by way of reasonable adjustments so that they have equal chances of a positive attainment outcome.
- There is no disabled student progression gap. Accordingly, our focus will be on:
 - Improving attainment rates for those with disabilities so that they are consistently within 3 points of the higher level attainment rate for all students.

Care leavers

50. We have judged the following based on our assessment of performance at paragraphs 38-40.

- We enrol very low numbers of care leavers and believe that the best way for us to contribute to raising the life chances of this disadvantaged group is through building

strategic partnerships with proximate local authorities and through our collaborative work to inspire and support care leavers into higher education, either at Harper Adams or within the consortium or more widely.

- Care leavers will be included within our Access to Harper contextualised offer making programme and our commitments through the Care Leavers' Covenant highlighted during admissions communications.
- We will continue to actively monitor the journeys of care leavers with a view to make early interventions and to ensure that they are actively encouraged to participate in our various programmes of support for continuation, attainment and post-course progression.

White, working class males

51. We have judged the following based on our assessment of performance at paragraphs 41-44.

- We are enrolling proportionately fewer white males and more white females from POLAR Q1-2 backgrounds, which mirrors our overall reduction in male and increase in female enrolments, albeit the changes are more exaggerated for the female POLAR Q1-2 groups. Accordingly, ambitious outreach work targeted at Q1-Q2 learners will take account of this.
- There is no continuation gap for white, working class males.
- There is a clear attainment gap for all males when compared with females overall (-13%), which includes across each comparator POLAR4 and IMD group. There is a five-year mean gap for IMD Q1-2 males of -6.6% when compared with male IMD Q3-5. There is an urgency to work to close this male attainment gap for all students and, in particular for IMD Q1-2 males.
- There is no progression gap for white, working class males. Accordingly, our focus will be on:
 - Reducing the attainment gap for all males, and through doing so, also improve any attainment gap for disadvantaged male students.

BTEC / vocational qualification entrants

52. The analysis in paragraph 45 means that:

- The initiatives to support the transition of BTEC students to higher education must continue so that recently improved retention rates can be improved further.
- The undergraduate curriculum introduced in 2017 requires scrutiny to ensure that all aspects of teaching and assessment demonstrate best inclusive practice and based on universal design principles so that BTEC students have a fair chance of success in their first year studies.

Accordingly, we will continue our successful work to focus transition and retention programmes on those from a BTEC background, given the propensity for BTEC students to come from a disadvantaged or under-represented background but will not include a specific improvement target within our Plan.

2.2 Aims and objectives

53. Our ambitious aims and stretching measurable objectives to improve the equality of representation at Harper Adams University and reduce the impacts of earlier disadvantage are summarised as follows:

Access

1. Increasing the proportion of full-time undergraduate students from POLAR4 Q1-2 postcodes from an aggregated rate of 14.4% in 2013-17 to 20% by the 2024/25 intake. This should translate to a target whereby the ratio of POLAR Q4-5:Q1-2 enrolments improves considerably from 4.6:1 (over the 2013-17 intakes) to 3.0:1 by the 2024/25 intake.
2. Increasing the proportion of full-time undergraduate students from IMD Q1-2 postcodes from an aggregated rate of 15.4% in 2013-17 to 20% by the 2024/25 intake.

This should translate to a target whereby the ratio of Q4-5:Q1-2 enrolments improves considerably from 3.6:1 (over the 2013-17 intakes) to 2.5:1 by the 2024/25 intake.

3. Committing to active partnership within the Higher Horizons + Outreach Hub, including at least 500 interactions a year led by our outreach team, so that the HE progression rate in Hub target schools increases for learners from POLAR4 Q1-2 postcodes.
4. Increasing the proportion of BAME students from an aggregated rate of 1.1% in 2013-17 to 3.5% by the 2024/25 intake.

Retention / continuation

5. Improving year 1 retention (and thus continuation) rates for students from POLAR4 Q1 so that they are consistently within 3 points of the retention rate for all our students from 2023/24 onwards (compared with -7% point continuation gap 2013-17 and -6% point retention gap in 2017/18).
6. Improving year 1 retention (and thus continuation) rates for students from IMD Q1 so that they are consistently within 3 points of the retention rate for all students from 2024/25 onwards (compared with a -13% point continuation gap in 2013-17).
7. Improving year 1 retention (and thus continuation) rates for BAME students so that they are consistently within 3 points of the retention rate for all students from 2024/25 onwards (compared with an aggregated retention -9% point gap in 2016-18).
8. Improving year 1 retention (and thus continuation) rates for mature students so that they are consistently within 3 points of the retention rates for all students from 2021/22 onwards (compared with a -10% point mean continuation rate gap 2013-17 and -6% aggregated retention gap 2016-18).

Given the propensity for students with these characteristics to enter with BTEC qualifications and the success of our Academic Guidance programme in supporting these students, some of our work will continue to target BTEC students (as in Table 17), although we will set no separate targets for the APP whilst retaining our attention to these students through our Success and Retention Plan.

Attainment

9. Reducing the attainment gap for those with disabilities so that higher award attainment is within 3 points of all students from 2020/21 onwards (compared with -4% point mean gap 2014-18).
10. Reducing the attainment gap for all males (with a -13% point mean gap against all females between 2014-2018) and, through doing so, improve the attainment gap for disadvantaged male students (a -6.6% point gap for IMD Q1-2 males against IMD Q3-5 males), so that higher award attainment for IMD Q1-2 males group is within 3 points of all students and within 5% points for all males compared with all females by 2024/25.

Progression

There is no identified progression to highly skilled employment or further study gaps although there is a need to continue our work in relation to placement support, 'Becoming a Professional', enterprise development and our Development Trust scheme to ensure that this equality of opportunity is maintained across all student groups. However, as the Development Trust scheme involves the provision of financial support in second and final years of study, alongside year-length, paid work experience, mentoring and networking opportunities, it has been included in Table 19. It is important to acknowledge the considerable support of sponsors for this Scheme and our ability to continue with this valuable scheme, including the associated financial support, is dependent on the ongoing commitment of their philanthropy.

3 Strategic measures

3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

Overview

54. Our Board of Governors receives routine reports on the development and implementation of

successive Access Agreements and Access and Participation Plans, which have been reviewed and recommended first by the Academic Board. The University Executive and Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee receive reports on key deliverables in our Access and Participation Plan. Since December 2020, a dedicated Access and Participation Plan Group (APP Group) has been created, which meets up to 10 times per annum, to monitor and evaluate the implementation of all aspects of our Plan. The membership for this group includes the Students' Union, representatives from academic departments and relevant professional support services. Chaired by the Director of Academic Services and Academic Registrar, other members from the University's leadership team include the Director of Education, Director of Marketing, Communications and Recruitment and the Head of Quality and Standards.

Alignment with other strategies

55. This plan aligns with key strategies and the emerging proposals were discussed and agreed with those who lead on each of them to ensure that their incorporation. The University's Equality and Diversity and Inclusion group, made up of staff and students from across the institution, has continued its work to support the delivery of our Single Equality Scheme (SES) and Action Plan. Our new [Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy 2021-26](#) aligns well with this Plan, in particular sections relating to curriculum, teaching and assessment.

Strategic measures

56. Much of our work, across the student journey, is underpinned by vital collaborations. For instance, our access work is dependent on effective relationships with other HE providers, schools, local authorities, employers, professional bodies and educational trusts. In particular, we have committed to continued collaborative outreach work within the Higher Horizons+ Uni Connect by providing the local Hub team with free access to our facilities, working estate, expertise and staff resources. We also support other Hubs' work within the consortium to meet the overall aim of improving HE progression rates for POLAR4 Q1-2 learners. We have committed to extending the work through the Higher Horizons Outreach Hub, from August 2019.
57. Our collaborative work with employers and industry bodies to support students to success, on-course and post-graduation, is world-leading¹³. Our courses are designed with extensive employer input and our placement arrangements are at the heart of our curricula and directly shape our course content, assessment arrangements and approaches to pedagogy so that our graduates are well prepared for the world of work. An applied curriculum is complemented by excellent careers and placement services, in which our activities with employers play a vital role.
58. Tables 16-18 summarise our strategic approach to meeting our aims set out in paragraph 53, within the context of our Evaluation Strategy, based on use of rich evidence base. In the tables below we highlight leading indicators that give us early intelligence on whether we and our learners are on track to achieving the outcomes expressed in our APP targets. The planned activities set out our approaches to outreach, admissions practices, teaching, learning and assessment and student support across the student lifecycle.

¹³ Ranked second in the world in the QS World University Subject Rankings for Agriculture & Forestry for 'employer reputation' in 2018 and 2019; winner of the WUSCA's 'Job Prospects' award in 2019, 2018, 2017 and in 2016.

Table 16 Access: Our strategic approach to improving equality in access to higher education

By 2024/25 we aim to:	How we aim to achieve our targets	Leading indicators to evaluate our performance
<p>Increase to 20% both the proportion of full-time undergraduate new entrants from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> POLAR4 quintiles 1-2 postcodes (PTA_1), including and an increase in the number from within 40 miles of the University and; Postcodes associated with Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1-2 (PTA_2) <p>Increase to 3.5% the proportion of BAME new entrants on full-time undergraduate courses. (PTA_3)</p>	<p>Raising aspirations and attainment We take an evidence-based approach to refine and prioritise our work based on our evaluation of what has worked and by understanding the priorities and benefits we can provide for our collaborative partners. We have three priority workstreams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering our REACHOUT programme - This intensive programme aims to raise aspirations and awareness of Higher Education and a wide range of career choices, including those within the agri-food chain. The programme works with years 5 to 13 and categorises schools on levels of intervention intensity, based on local HE progression rates and free school meal levels. Activities will be rescoped for 2023/24 onwards to focus more closely on raising pre-16 attainment working with a select number of schools within the region. We will deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects related to STEM curriculum for KS3-5, working directly with teachers. Pupil support resource around revision, study skills and exam techniques, information literacy. Access to the Unibuddy Community – online platform for pupils to engage with current students share and connect. (Supporting study skills and transition to university) Working with UniConnect/ Higher Horizons+ to undertake aspiration raising and work associated with our REACHOUT programme. Working in partnership with LEAF liaising with schools on sustainable agriculture and land use as a career and raise general awareness about the land-based economy, as part of Pillar 1 of the School of Sustainable Food and Farming. <p>Extending our geographical reach to increase the number of enrolments from our priority APP groups Whilst our work to raise pre-16 attainment will be based on a systematic programme of collaboration with selected regional schools and colleges (see REACHOUT above), we will continue to extend our reach beyond the region, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blended WP work – using Harper Advance virtual resources and working with organisations such as Speakers for Schools to deliver sessions virtually. This is complemented by on-site visits and residential. We are working with organisations that will enable us to engage with an increasing number of mature learners and those interested in apprenticeships at level 5 and above. Offering targeted scholarships through our Development Trust for specific schools identified using our analysis of our HARDI (Harper Adams Rural Deprivation Indicator) dataset, based on the rural deprivation indicator we have developed. <p>Removing barriers to access We recognise that an increasing number of our prospective students come from diverse backgrounds and may need help to prepare for the course, including achieving the necessary work experience to meet our requirements for our compulsory integrated place year. We provide support through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to Harper – our contextual admissions programme. Access to Agriculture – enhanced marketing and communications through our partnerships working e.g. working with Speakers for Schools. Onsite residential to students from non-traditional backgrounds and/or urban backgrounds e.g. Harper Adams Experience, Reframing nature and other opportunities such as the recent residential by Westminster Academy as featured on BBC Countryfile. Work with SCiP Alliance (formerly WPCG) supporting students from military families. <p>Increase the numbers and diversity of students studying one of our growing suite of apprenticeship courses, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing/highlighting through our outreach and widening access interventions the opportunities afforded by studying for an apprenticeship. Continuing to leverage our network of 1200+ employers (placement providers and employers of our graduates) to identify more employers to take on Harper Adams apprentices 	<p>Numbers of schools (prioritised based on their pupil demographic) and pupils engaged in our out-reach and attainment raising work.</p> <p>Application, offer and acceptance rates from applicants in our priority groups.</p> <p>Enrolment rates for priority groups at the beginning of their course and throughout.</p> <p>Evaluation reports working with Nuffield and EMWPREP.</p>

Table 17 Continuation: Our strategic approach to improving equality in retention and continuation

By 2024/25 we aim to:	How we aim to achieve our targets	Leading indicators to evaluate our performance
<p>Improve retention rates for the following groups of to be within 3% of university average:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POLAR4 quintiles 1-2 postcodes (PTS_1) • Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1-2 postcodes (PTS_2) • BAME Students (PTS_3) • Mature students (PTS_4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to strengthen support for student transitions through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transitions Conference is now a core service offered to all students promoting a sense of belonging and supporting the acquisition of basic study skills. Priority for follow-up learner and disability support will continue to be on relevant APP groups, with a particular focus on those with non-traditional qualifications, where we have evidence of enhanced educational outcomes as a result of this intervention. ○ Extending induction back into the pre-arrival stage and further into the first term, but still with a focus on welcome week and introduce reinduction for all other year groups. • Develop further our calendar of community activities (involving both staff and students) led by the University EDI Group, to promote a sense of belonging. • Develop/enhance social network prior to and during their studies for special student groups including mature students, commuter students and students with a disability, through closer collaboration between the Students' Union and the Student Services team. • Continuously review and enhance our academic support and support to study arrangements, including the role of course tutors and further investment from 2022 onwards in our Wellbeing services team and student assistance programme. <p><i>See below priorities relating to our learning and teaching approaches and course design which support enhanced retention and academic progression</i></p>	<p>Student engagement (including class attendance), submission of formative assessments, attendance at course tutoring and academic guidance and learner support sessions).</p> <p>Support to study – case numbers and/or support needs.</p> <p>Break in study or withdrawal requests – numbers, circumstances (to discern if there are any trends)</p>

Table 18 Attainment: Our strategic approach to improving equality in attainment

By 2024/25 we aim to:	How we aim to achieve our targets	Leading indicators to evaluate our performance
<p>Improve attainment rate gaps to be within 3% of the university average for first class and upper second class degrees, for the following groups of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled (PTS_5) • White economically disadvantaged males (PTS_6) 	<p>Develop further our inclusive approaches to learning and teaching, drawing on lessons learnt during the pandemic, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our approach to assessment shown to benefit student groups in our APP, in particular those with a declared disability or multiple disabilities; • Blended teaching supported by digital learning resources: offering lecture notes and recordings to enable students to review and revise topics. (Key priority for students in the Students' Union Student Voice surveys). <p>Develop and implement from 2023/24 onwards our revised undergraduate (Harper Forward) curriculum, with the following features to promote success from access to employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology based on course-level design thinking, ensuring students are prepared for future learning and assessments and preventing the bunching of assessments at the end of each academic year; • Curriculum centred on learner journey(s), recognising where there are diversities in terms of starting points, to ensure we plan and provide support and scaffolding drawing upon inclusive teaching and learning methods. • Inclusive Assessment Strategy. • Harper Graduates Attributes (below) to promote employability and personal development embedded in all years of study, showing what a student will be able to do after they graduate from any level of a programme and presented in an accessible way for students. <div data-bbox="790 810 1451 917" style="text-align: center;"> <p>The image shows six colored boxes representing Harper's strategic pillars: Harper Applied (red with gear icon), Harper Digital (orange with network icon), Harper Care (green with heart icon), Harper Global (blue with globe icon), Harper Growth (purple with person icon), and Harper Inspire (black with lightbulb icon).</p> </div>	<p>Average marks by subjects and student groups.</p> <p>Support to study – case numbers and/or support needs.</p> <p>Progression rates by subject and student group (compared to the University average).</p> <p>Student feedback (via our student representatives and via the Students' Union Student Voice Survey).</p> <p>Results from the NSS & our internal annual course survey for questions relating to learning and teaching and related support.</p> <p>Graduate outcomes results.</p>

59. Table 19 outlines how our financial support dovetails with a collaborative programme with sponsoring employers to support progression to highly skilled employment. It is not means-tested but based on merit, albeit under-represented and disadvantaged students are nudged to apply and provided with individualised support through the application process. For some awards, the assessment criteria take into account characteristics of under-representation or disadvantage but are not absolute requirements. The Development Trust scheme seeks to ensure we maintain outstanding outcomes for all students and, as there is no progression gap for any student group, we have not included a specific target in the Appendix target tables. We understand that the OfS is interested in financial support schemes and so have included the scheme herein for completeness, although it contributes to our ‘maintenance work’ rather than improvement targets. As our progression record is outstanding and we have no gaps nor improvement targets, the measures herein do not focus on the excellent work we already do in this area to ensure all students achieve their post-graduation aspirations and potential.

Table 19 Progression: Our strategic approach to improving equality in progression including financial support

By 2024/25 we aim to:	How we aim to achieve our targets	Leading indicators to evaluate our performance
Ensure all students without established networks and limited social capital are able to find good placements and graduate jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop our network of 1200+ employers through our research, management of student placements, through the Harper Club (alumni network) and through university events including our Annual Careers and Placement Fair and related events. Through our Development Trust promote funded opportunities to under-represented and disadvantaged students, providing support to them to apply for competitive, merit-based paid placement, mentoring and networking opportunities, plus associated cash awards for second and final years of study, through provision of information, advice and guidance throughout the application and selection process. 	<p>Performance profile for placement year by subject and student group.</p> <p>Annual analysis of funding given by our Development Trust by student group.</p> <p>Feedback from our employers.</p>

3.2 Student consultation

60. We established a Success and Retention Committee in 2018 to shape and review the early phase of our APP work. Its role has now been superseded by the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee. This former committee met to consider an initial outline draft and subsequently endorse a final-stage draft. We also informed the final draft with student feedback from outside of our formal committee structure to supplement the student voice so that more students have been able to contribute to our Plan than sit on university-level committees. This included members of our Student Academic Group that comprises all course representatives as an informal cross-University 'student sounding board', our newly elected SU postholders and individual students 'without portfolio' but with characteristics of relevance to our plans. In order to strengthen the student voice in relation to the planning and evaluation of our future access work, our Outreach Team works with an informal Student Access Panel. Student members will include those who are actively involved as participants in our outreach programmes and they will assist in the initial evaluation of outreach programmes, prior to review by the University Executive. Our Students' Union revised its internal organisation from 2019/20 onwards to create a new sabbatical Vice-President post (Inclusion and Engagement), in part, to support the work set out in the Access and Participation Plan and activities within our Success and Retention Plan. Our Students' Union President and our Students' Union Director have both endorsed this paragraph in lieu of a separate statement (available on request) to indicate the SU's commitment to support our planned work.
61. In summary, our discussions with student representatives during the development of our Plan led to the following changes to our arrangements:
- a. The creation of an informal panel (including student ambassadors) helped our Outreach team to learn from their experience of 'what works' in outreach settings, and to help evaluate the success of outreach initiatives described in the logic chain;
 - b. Agreement to focus on a joint (i.e. a student community and University) 'Respect' campaign to address potential issues of isolation, and retention, amongst under-represented student groups. This campaign began in 2019/20 and its progress is now monitored and evaluated by the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee;
 - c. Agreement with our Students' Union that the Vice-President Post will focus on inclusion and engagement of all students to ensure that the University's work on academic initiatives is matched by the Students' Union's approach to social activities. Regular (fortnightly) meetings between the Students' Union and the University's Vice-Chancellor and senior staff enables progress in this area to be monitored and assessed;
 - d. Input from student ambassadors programme (who assist with recruitment events, including major agricultural shows across the UK, outreach and mentoring work in schools and at University events) who are representative of the student community at large, including those from under-represented groups. Although this is already the case, close attention will be paid to the selection of students for particular events to provide appropriate role models for those assisting with, for example, specific outreach or recruitment activities;
 - e. The implementation of a training programme from 2019/20 for student representatives to further develop their awareness and confidence in acting as 'critical friends' to the University on the implementation and evaluation of our Plan. This programme will be led by our Learning and Teaching team, with support from our Head of Organisational Development. It will include our Student Life Representative (formerly Student Wardens) who act as resident mentors to first year students, assisting them, in particular, with the transition to higher education. We will evaluate the success of this programme by measuring the engagement we receive in the 'student voice' components of our Plan and via feedback from students from under-represented groups when evaluating the progress of our Plan.

3.3 Evaluation strategy

62. Our evaluation strategy takes a mixed-method approach, employing, and wherever possible triangulating, elements of activities, outputs and outcome evaluation. In this way, we aim to determine whether a particular intervention is working well, and, if not, how it might be improved and/or changed, thereby enabling us to prioritize our resources as a small specialist provider. We use both qualitative and quantitative datasets (see para. 64) covering the whole applicant-student-graduate lifecycle and progress over the entire life-time of the plan:
1. The inputs and resources (money, time, people, skills) invested
 2. The activities undertaken to achieve the APP objectives (e.g. widening access programmes of work, collaborative projects/interventions, learner and disability support interventions)
 3. The outputs of the APP programme (e.g. enrolled student numbers for each special group; retention and educational attainment rates)
 4. The outcomes of the APP programme (changing student demographics at each stage of the student life-cycle; educational attainment and satisfaction rates; positive feedback concerning teaching and assessment; awarding and employment gaps for every group compared to university and sector averages in the subject we teach).
63. Our evaluation strategy is based on our Theory of Change that has been developed as a result of the evaluation work since the original five-year plan was approved in 2019.

Figure 1 Harper Adams University Theory of Change

<p>What needs to Change? Attract and prepare for employment more students from diverse backgrounds to support the future of the land-based and related industries.</p>	<p>How we can make a difference?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad outreach and awareness raising work, delivered in partnership with others. • Focused and meaningful collaborations with a select number of schools or colleges. • Working more closely with our employers and alumni to promote land-based careers. • Delivering good quality courses that attract students from diverse backgrounds and scaffold and pace learning appropriately. • Network of learner and disability support, wellbeing services and course teams, delivering proactive support to build confidence, study and personal skills, whilst also responding to individual students' needs at key moments in their studies and personal life. • Learning and teaching approaches and practices (including assessment) that are inclusive by design, thereby limiting the need for targeted work that make some learners feel marginalised or different, and enhancing the educational outcomes for all. • Offering bursaries and funded placements working with employers and our Development Trust. • Continuously enhancing our links with employers to ensure our courses remain relevant and that our graduates remain some of the most employable in the higher education sector. 	<p>Measuring the Potential Impact of Our Work (whilst also maintaining the trajectory of achieving our APP targets)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing confidence of different student groups (pulse surveys, reflective practice assessments). • Student feedback focused on enhancement rather than exclusively on remedial work (surveys) • Increased sense of belonging and engagement with the university community of staff, students and stakeholders. (retention rates & evaluation of community projects) • Improving retention and academic success (OfS metrics and measures in our student performance annual report) • Longer-term success (for the students and learners we support through our REACHOUT work) (Evaluation provided by EMWPRP) • Confident teaching and support staff (i.e. through staff feedback channels). • Qualitative evidence to build our understanding what interventions have made a difference and why. (Pedagogical and other research) • Graduate outcomes and wellbeing measures (Graduate Outcomes survey and feedback from alumni)
<p>The Challenge we face in delivering change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, land-based and related industries need more graduates but the traditional pool for such students is static or diminishing. • Addressing significant global issues (relating to sustainability, food security and quality, promotion of human and animal health) needs diversity of thinking, achieved by attracting a broader section of society into this industry, including the types of learners that are under-represented in Higher Education. • Students from non-farming backgrounds and/or more urban settings do not consider higher courses in some of our subjects. • Many students from under-represented groups come with less social capital and different educational starting points (e.g. more have non-traditional qualifications, limited resources in terms of study space and IT kit, and connections to find a suitable placement). • A higher proportion of our students (compared to most other HE providers) have disabilities, which can potentially affect their ability to study successfully. • Some of our newer course offerings in particular attract students with greater mental health and wellbeing needs that affect their ability to study successfully. 	<p>The Challenge we face in making a difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural differences associated with students from very different backgrounds studying in a smaller specialist university. • Supporting students to be independent learners whilst also ensuring their support needs are met. • Helping students from non-traditional/non-farming backgrounds to attain relevant work experience and connections to find and flourish during their placement year. • Financial investment needed to attract a wider student demographic. • Our size means that flexing our resources to meet changes in needs and scale of support work can be very challenging. 	<p>Challenges of measuring impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing meaningful conclusions and recommendations when datasets are based on small sample sizes. We shall be drawing on recent research by TASO on evaluation with small sample sizes. • Regulatory scrutiny based on quantitative metrics based on smaller sample sizes compared to other providers, meaning a small number of students can skew our performance profile. • Staff time and capabilities to undertake meaningful evaluation. • Understanding the pandemic has had on our performance profile, meaning there is a risk in making radical changes to our work associated with student success and employment outcomes. • Resources to innovate our services and teaching and respond to peaks of demand from individual students seeking additional support.

64. In addition to our use of the OfS datasets, we collect and/or evaluate routinely a range of qualitative and quantitative data, sourced both internally and externally, to assess our portfolio of Access and Participation and Student Success work (as show in table 16 above):

Raising aspirations for HE and widening access to our courses

- Admissions data: UCAS data (sector trends and patterns relating to our benchmarking group of universities), enquirer and application data (relating to open days, application rates, offer rates and acceptance rate for each special student group and split by subject area).
- Engagement data: Numbers and types of students engaged through our widening access work and informal qualitative feedback from pupils and/or their teachers. Where possible these data have been triangulated with admissions data, enabling us to prioritise and streamline our access and participation work. This means that as a small specialist provider we have capacity to develop to fewer, more focused and richer collaborative activities to support the new priorities identified by the Director of Access and Participation.
- Pipeline data: evaluation of level 3 providers by student numbers, population demographics and subject to enable us to continuous review and prioritise our schools and colleges outreach work.
- (NEW) From 2023 onwards we intend to enrich our work by undertaking systematic evaluation research associated with our interventions to raise pre-16 attainment levels. We will be testing the achievement of the following outcomes by testing pupils before and after our intervention (see Table 16 above): deeper/wider knowledge of (subject matter associated with the project/intervention); personal confidence before and after the intervention; likelihood of considering a land-based or allied career, plus academic skills to be agreed with teachers.
- Research undertaken by EMWPRP and other partners such as the SCiP Alliance.

Student success

By special student group and subject:

- Retention data: including reasons for leaving/transferring.
- Achievement data: including progression (including the placement year) and awarding gaps.
- Student satisfaction and other feedback: including the NSS, our internal annual survey, module feedback (by exception) and the Students' Union Student Voice survey, which focuses on barriers to learning, opportunities for enhancement and wrap-around social and other support. We also undertake pulse surveys when we identify a specific issue requires priority attention outwith our cycle of surveys and reporting.
- Employability data: based on the Graduate Outcomes dataset and evaluation on the impact of placement and other work experience funded by our Development Trust.

All parts of the student lifecycle

65. We will continue to draw upon educational research that shows what works, for example, by the centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education ([TASO](#)) to inform our routine continuous quality enhancement work for all groups of students and/or special groups. Our high-level data requirements to conduct evaluation of progress against outcomes are set out in Tables 16-19. To successfully implement our strategy, we will need to have a comprehensive approach to data collection and interpretation which covers an extended data set, building on the work we have undertaken to inform our APP. At present, we can meet the requirements of the APP, though in some cases quantitative data management and presentation could be made easier with more sophisticated systems that are beyond the financial reach of some smaller, specialist Universities. For that reason, we believe it necessary for some 'paid for' datasets to be made available across the higher education sector within institutional subscription rates, so that there is a level playing field on data to inform future APP work, an issue that we will pursue with others in the HE sector.

66. We are engaged in a range of networks where access and participation activities and the evaluation of impact will be considered and we will seek best practice examples in the process of our engagement. This is likely to include engagement with TASO to both learn from best practice and to share experiences of working in rural environments, where we will be able to offer particular insights. The rural dimension is also explored with other institutions specialising in rurally based subjects so that we can determine a specific ‘rural what works’ approach to our APP and its evaluation.
67. Governance of our strategy will be the ultimate responsibility of the University’s Academic Board. However, the Academic Board will be expected to report on overall progress with the APP and with the outcome of evaluations, to the University’s Board of Governors. We will evaluate the information provided to our Academic Board and Board of Governors, and any training provided to Governors on access and participation matters, so that we can ensure that the Governing Body is aware of the provisions of our APP and the approach we have adopted for its monitoring and performance assessment.
68. Our cycle of evaluation is mainly one that is annual, notwithstanding that we know that some of our activities will have longer-term impact on outcomes (such as our outreach and attainment-raising work with primary schools pupils). Output evaluation will take place routinely and, depending on the activity, at least annually and sometimes more frequently in relation to outreach work. As we are working on a five-year Plan, we think it prudent to include a significant mid-Plan review in 2022/23, so we can be clear that the overall Plan activities are supporting the overall ambitions to improve the diversity of our student body and that students are succeeding in their studies.
69. We applied the OfS self-assessment of evaluation plans tool to 15 of the programmes outlined in Tables 16-19 that relate directly to the targets we have included in our Plan, in addition to the Development Trust Programme (which relates to maintaining progression outcomes and has no specific Plan targets but, as it includes financial support, has been included for completeness). In doing so, we identified some opportunities for improving our approaches to monitoring activity and for adjusting our established overview evaluation arrangements. In particular, we created a Student Access Panel, involving students who work within our access programmes as ambassadors and mentors, so that evaluation of impact and recommendations are better informed prior to discussion by the University Executive. Our self-assessments resulted in the ratings in Table 20.

Table 20 Summary of self-assessment ratings of APP evaluation plans using the OfS tool

Dimension of evaluation	Total score	Categorisation of evaluation practice
Strategic context	20/24	Advanced
Programme design	16/18	Advanced
Evaluation design	6/9	Good
Evaluation implementation	18/20	Emerging
Learning from evaluation	21/22	Advanced

70. The ‘Emerging’ score for ‘Evaluation Implementation’ in Table 20 is largely because of the nature and/or scale of most of our programmes and the informality of some of our current approaches. In the case of some of our success programmes, we are also not in a position to measure impact on individuals other than through participant self-assessment (which we undertake), given the numerous factors influencing success outcomes. Use of the tool has reassured us that our revised evaluation plans are proportionate and robust enough to inform any need for programme change where the desired impact is not observable.
71. We do not have sufficient students in receipt of financial support to use the statistical tool from the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit. We are redesigning our survey tool for

recipients in 2018/19 to gather data for evaluation. This is based primarily on the OfS survey tool and supplemented with further questions suitable to the unique nature of our Development Trust scheme. The survey will build upon feedback already received from students and is planned to be conducted over the summer of 2019. This feedback will inform the Development Trust Board of the extent to which the Scheme supports students in their study and career aspirations and any revisions to the operation of the programme that might further these aims. Recent feedback has prompted revisions to the timing of the application cycle, for example.

3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

72. At an operational level, each of the programmes in Tables 16-19 is assigned a lead for reporting purposes. We will consider each programme's progress on its planned activities and outputs at one or more of the following groupings: the APP Group; University Executive; course team admissions review meetings; Agriculture and Extended Agriculture programmes course assessment boards; annual course monitoring meetings; and the Development Trust Board. Most of these forums include student representation and, as a routine part of our business, students will help shape our arrangements, with their own suggestions and perspectives on what is most likely to be effective. This approach ensures that course-specific and institution-wide activities are reviewed by the most appropriate stakeholders at operational and strategic levels and include opportunities for students to shape plans.

4 Provision of information to students

73. The University plans to charge fees in line with the fee cap. The University's position on fees will be clearly set out in materials that 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 includes information about financial support we provide and how we help students manage their finances, such as through flexible accommodation deposit and instalment payment plans as required. This information will also be prominently displayed on the website of Harper Adams University, in advance of each successive 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 detailed Fees and Charges Brochure for two rolling entrant years, including a clear statement on any inflationary fee increases. We invite all applicants to the campus for an interview or to attend an Offer Holder Day and these provide opportunities for students to ask individualised questions on the costs of studying at Harper Adams. We send a copy of the University's information on fees and charges to all applicants receiving an offer of a place at the University. There are no plans for guaranteed, pre-entry bursaries or fee waivers, as we make all financial awards on-course, for verified need to cover costs of study, hardship or against the criteria of each Development Trust award. The Fees and Charges Brochure includes a link to the Undergraduate Finance page and makes clear the basis of the on-course financial awards available. We are also working closely with Keele University to ensure appropriate financial support for students of the new Harper and Keele Veterinary School, which will have its first intake in 2020, and for which there is a dedicated information website and Fees and Charges Brochure.

Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflationary statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we intend to increase fees each year using the RPI-X

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - Fifth Year MEng degree on campus	£9,250
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - First Year degree on campus	£9,250
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - Fourth Year degree on campus	£9,250
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - Second Year degree on campus	£9,250
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - Third Year Honours on campus	£9,250
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - Top up Honours / Non honours	£9,250
First degree	2017-18 or later starters - Year Zero degree on campus	£9,250
Foundation degree	2017-18 or later starters - Year 1 Foundation degree on campus	£9,250
Foundation degree	2017-18 or later starters - Year 3 Foundation degree on campus	£9,250
Foundation degree	2017-18 or later starters - Year 4 Foundation degree on campus	£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0	2017-18 or later starters - Year 0 Foundation degree on campus	£9,250
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	2017-18 or later starters - Third Year Honours on placement	£1,850
Sandwich year	2017-18 or later starters - Year 2 Foundation degree on placement	£1,850
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual 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	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	Part-time study of full time courses	£4,625
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	Livestock Market Operations and Management	£1,875
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual part-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	*	*

Targets and investment plan

2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: Harper Adams University

Provider UKPRN: 10040812

Investment summary

The OFS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OFS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

Note about the data:

The investment forecasts below in access, financial support and research and evaluation does not represent not the total amount spent by providers in these areas. It is the additional amount that providers have committed following the introduction of variable fees in 2006-07. The OFS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total access activity investment (£)	£557,700.00	£569,000.00	£580,200.00	£591,900.00	£603,800.00
Access (pre-16)	£155,800.00	£159,000.00	£162,100.00	£165,400.00	£168,700.00
Access (post-16)	£203,100.00	£207,200.00	£211,300.00	£215,500.00	£219,900.00
Access (adults and the community)	£151,800.00	£154,800.00	£157,900.00	£161,100.00	£164,300.00
Access (other)	£47,000.00	£48,000.00	£48,900.00	£49,900.00	£50,900.00
Financial support (£)	£306,075.00	£277,875.00	£278,450.00	£288,275.00	£297,900.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£120,200.00	£122,600.00	£125,100.00	£127,600.00	£130,100.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£5,783,335.00	£6,207,255.00	£6,344,460.00	£6,727,680.00	£6,820,230.00
Access investment	9.6%	9.2%	9.1%	8.8%	8.9%
Financial support	1.5%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%
Research and evaluation	2.1%	2.0%	2.0%	1.9%	1.9%
Total investment (as %HFI)	13.2%	12.0%	11.9%	11.5%	11.6%

Targets and investment plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: Harper Adams University

Provider UKPRN: 10040812

Targets

Table 2a - Access

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
To increase enrolments of students from under-represented postcodes	PTA_1	Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	To increase the proportions of enrolments on to full-time undergraduate programmes of those from POLAR 4 Q1-2 postcodes at Harper Adams University	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	15.1% for new entrants in 2017/18	17.2%	17.9%	18.6%	19.3%	20.0%	The associated proportionate increase in Q1-2 enrolments is intended to impact on our overall student profile such that the ratio of Q4-5 to Q1-2 enrolments is reduced to 3 : 1 by 2024/25 compared with 4.3 : 1 in 2017/18.
To increase enrolments of students from socio-economically disadvantaged postcodes	PTA_2	Socio-economic	To increase the proportions of enrolments on to full-time undergraduate programmes of those from IMD Q1-2 postcodes at Harper Adams University	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	15.8% for new entrants in 2017/18	16.2%	17.0%	18.0%	19.0%	20.0%	The associated proportionate increase in Q1-2 enrolments is intended to impact on our overall student profile such that the ratio of Q4-5 to Q1-2 enrolments is reduced to 2.5 : 1 by 2024/25 compared with 3.5 : 1 in 2017/18.
To increase enrolments of students who are under-represented at Harper Adams University when compared with wider society	PTA_3	Ethnicity	To increase the proportions of enrolments on to full-time undergraduate programmes of those of British Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity at Harper Adams University	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	0.9% for new entrants in 2017-18	2.5%	2.75%	3.0%	3.25%	3.5%	
	PTA_4												
	PTA_5												
	PTA_6												
	PTA_7												
	PTA_8												

Table 2b - Success

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
To improve the retention rate gap for students from underrepresented groups at Harper Adams	PTS_1	Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	Percentage difference in retention rates between POLAR 4 quintile 1 students and other students is reduced to no more than 3% points	No	Other data source		-8.5% point gap	No more than -6.5% point gap	No more than -5% point gap	No more than -4% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	Because of the volatility of the data in our data set, we have used a three year rate mean up to 2017/18 entry to establish the scale of our gap. We have elected for internal year 1 end of year retention data with a view to access more timely data than HESA continuation data and focus on internal retention
To improve the retention rate gap for students from underrepresented groups at Harper Adams	PTS_2	Socio-economic	Percentage difference in retention rates between IMD Q1 students and other students is reduced to no more than 3% points	No	Other data source		-13% point gap (continuation used as proxy for retention)	No more than -9% point gap	No more than -7.5% point gap	No more than -6% point gap	No more than -4.5% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	Because of the volatility of the data in the OfS data set, we use a five year continuation rate mean up to 2016/17 entry as a proxy to establish the scale of our retention gap as we have currently have no internal data. We use internal end of year 1 retention data for future gap reduction targets as it is more timely data than HESA continuation data and we want to focus on internal retention
To improve the retention rate gap for students from underrepresented groups at Harper Adams	PTS_3	Ethnicity	Percentage difference in retention rates between BAME students and other students is reduced to no more than 3% points	No	Other data source		-9% point gap	No more than -7% point gap	No more than -6% gap	No more than -5% gap	No more than -4% gap	No more than -3% point gap	Because of the volatility of the data in our data set, we use a three year rate mean up to 2017/18 entry to establish the scale of our gap. We use internal end of year 1 retention data with a view to access more timely data than HESA continuation data and focus on internal retention
To improve the retention rate gap for students from underrepresented groups at Harper Adams	PTS_4	Mature	Percentage difference in retention rates between mature students and other students is reduced to no more than 3% points	No	Other data source		-6% point gap	No more than -4% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	No more than -3% point gap	Because of the volatility of the data in our data set, we have used a three year rate mean up to 2017/18 entry to establish the scale of our gap. We have elected for internal year 1 end of year retention data with a view to access more timely data than HESA continuation data and focus on internal retention
To improve the attainment rate gap for disabled students	PTS_5	Disabled	Percentage difference in first and upper second class Honours Degree rates between disabled students and other students is reduced to no more than 3% points	No	The access and participation dataset		-4% point gap	No more than -3% gap	No more than -3% gap	No more than -3% gap	No more than -3% gap	No more than -3% gap	Five year mean data up to 2017/18 graduates used to establish gap, given rate of volatility
To improve the attainment rate gap for students from underrepresented groups at Harper Adams	PTS_6	White economically disadvantaged males	Percentage difference in first and upper second class Honours Degree rates between white, working class (using IMD Q1-2) males and other male students is reduced to no more than 3% points	No	The access and participation dataset		-6.6% point gap	No more than -6% gap	No more than -5% gap	No more than -4% gap	No more than -3% gap	No more than -3% gap	Five year mean data up to 2017/18 graduates used to establish gap, given rate of volatility
	PTS_7												
	PTS_8												

Table 2c - Progression

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	

