HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY **Item 02**
Board of Governors
29 February 2024

iv. that the proportion of 18-year olds applying for University places was the lowest that it had been for some 40-years and that the lower than expected applications were in common with much of the rest of the sector. Although some course areas continued to perform well, other areas were facing a challenging market. Members noted that all department areas would try to build on last year's progress between now and the start of the academic year in September 2024. Members noted that there may be a range of issues contributing to this national trend, including the cost of living, the 100% fee burden on English students, as well as the impact of the narrative around "rip-off degrees" in the UK affecting individual choices.

v. that the University was geared up to respond to these challenging market forces through investment in its Student Recruitment team, including the appointment of a new manager late in the cycle last year. The team was focusing on distinguishing features such as very high employability figures, extended degree pathways, and to an extent, apprenticeships (although members noted on discussion that apprenticeships were labour intensive and less cost-effective for small to small-medium sized employers).

vi. that at this stage in the year it was uncertain how current enrolment numbers would translate into September 2024, given fluctuations in course areas. However, early investigations suggest that the Vet Nursing programme warrants closer scrutiny. Several factors, such as unpaid placements and the ability to obtain the same qualification through on-the-job experience may be making the degree pathway less attractive and less financially viable for students. Members received reassurance that the Veterinary School had outperformed its financial targets every year since it was created, and that the Vet School as a whole invariably achieved its student targets (in fact, it had increased the maximum intake from 110 to 144), so that there was some headroom to consider the model. Now that the five-year review was underway (substantive item to follow on the Agenda), it would be prudent to consider the business case, to identify any areas of challenge, and then develop plans to mitigate the risks identified. **LF/KB**

vii. that there was a tension between meeting income targets and developing comprehensive course coverage, with reference for example to Food courses and prioritising resources appropriately between the undergraduate and postgraduate offering. For Food undergraduate courses, for example, the programme been consolidated with some changes to the teaching delivery to enhance the student experience. The changes also included some block delivery in order to maximise synergies with teaching the apprenticeship programme.

viii. that the next Harper Together event was scheduled for 8 May 2024, to which all members were warmly invited. Plans for the day included presenting an honorary award and some long-service awards, as well as the scholarship awards in the afternoon.

ix. that the EFRA select committee would be attending campus in the week commencing 4 March 2024 and that a portion of the visit would be broadcast.

x. that the biorefinery proposal in partnership with Wykes was progressing and that members had recently attended a visit of the Wykes site which had proved very informative. Wykes were due to attend campus to discuss potential heads of terms, so although contractual arrangements were in a very early stage and still subject to negotiation, progress appeared positive.

xi. that the University had obtained guidance from the OfS in relation to its reporting requirements for the Station Quarter and Institute of Animal Diagnostics & Health (IADH) projects. The OfS had confirmed that neither

project amounted to a new “campus” for reporting purposes.

xii. that the University would be involved in a school and community engagement

prices cover (e.g. transport). In addition, a strategic sustainability group had been set up between members of the University and the SU in order to work collaboratively and identify actions and assistance required to help the SU achieve its goals. Members agreed that it would be helpful to receive an update on the work of this strategic sustainability group.

KB/LF/EM/JH

refresh of the current digital solutions available. Following the broader governance structure review approved by the Board in November 2023, a Digital and Enterprise sub-committee would be formed which would take responsibility for reviewing, identifying, and considering digital solutions.

JH

23/30 Risk Management

Received: an updated report from the University Secretary in relation to the key areas of risk monitored by the Board.

Noted:

i. that the papers included the full risk register, cuts of the data to highlight the risks for which the Board had oversight, as well as the top-10 institutional risks.

ii. that there was one additional risk to which members' attention should be drawn since the last meeting of the Board in November 2023, pertaining to a shift in approach from landowners to renting land. It had been noted recently that landowners were seeking to diversify their portfolios and that there was therefore less farmland available for lease. Members noted that the University had sought to mitigate this risk by leasing small pockets of land from multiple landowners, as well as leveraging the farmland it owns, and that the risk was currently not deemed to be above "medium".

23/31 Committees

Noted: that the Honorary Awards Committee is due to meet on 9 April 2024 and that nominations for honorary degrees or fellowships were invited.

A. Finance, People & Resources Committee (FPR)

Received: a report from the meeting of FPR on 22 February 2024, including changes made to arrangements for the 2024-35 budget and financial planning round, as well as a summary of the review of Financial Regulations and amendments recommended by the FPR Committee.

Noted:

i. that a five-year forecast will be reviewed by FPR in June 2024, and thereafter presented to the Board in July 2024. **LF/AP**

ii. that the new format of the Committee (incorporating the Staffing and Farm Strategy Committees into the Finance & General Purposes Committee) following approval of the new governance structure in November 2023 had been successful, with members commenting on the breadth and relevance of topics of discussion.

iii. that the FPR Committee had sought assurance on risk following the recent Post Office scandal, noting that organisations can become beholden to suppliers. Members noted that the FPR had received broad assurance that members continued to strike the right balance of appropriate challenge and support, and that questions were always welcome without waiting for a committee meeting.

Endorsed:

i. the amended Terms of Reference for the FPR Committee, permitting the

iii. the suggested amendment to the Treasury Management Policy to increase the approved headroom limit for foreign currencies to £1m. **LF**

B. Audit & Risk Management Committee (ARMC)

Received: a report from the meeting of the ARMC on 25 January 2024

Noted: that interview and selection arrangements for the provision of internal and external audit services had been completed, with UNIAC due to start in Summer 2024 for provision of internal audit services, and BDO to start the following year for external services.

Endorsed: the decision of ARMC to proceed with interview and selection arrangements for the provision of internal and external audit services.

C. Joint Academic Board and Joint Management Board for the Harper & Keele Veterinary School

Received: a report from the University Secretary detailing an update to the Terms of Reference for the Join Boards, and an update on the five-year review of the Collaboration Agreement, including details of proposed changes for ease of reference.

Noted:

i. that the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference for the joint boards reflected staffing changes, primarily at Keele, to ensure that the terms remained fit for purpose.

ii. that included within the papers for members' ease of reference was the scoping document for the five-year review of the collaboration agreement, detailing the thought process and offering assurance and transparency to the Board that any proposed changes were intended to increase flexibility of the provision. Members noted that there were no significant or troubling suggestions from either institution.

iii. that there would always be scope for further opportunities to review the arrangement, but the objective of this review had been to increase operational flexibility without fundamentally altering the set-up of the school prior to accreditation.

iv. that there were restrictive covenants written into the agreement that members may find beneficial to discuss in more detail, and that separate arrangements could be made to do this via the Governance Manager or the University Secretary. **AP/KB**

Approved:

i. the recommendation to confer delegated authority to the Vice-Chancellor to sign the suggested changes to the Collaboration Agreement subject to any feedback received at the meeting of the Joint Management Board on 7 March 2024 and thereafter as required.

IADH and the minutes of the meeting of the sub-group of the Board for IADH on 30 January 2024 where the options for the lease were considered.

ii. a verbal update from the Chief Financial Officer detailing progress since the last meeting of the sub-group.

Noted:

i. that planning permission had been received without the requirement to go to a full panel, thereby validating the significant effort put in at the pre-planning stage.

ii. that work was ongoing in terms of negotiating the lease and that the sub-group may need to meet a further time to ensure scrutiny and oversight of the proposed terms.

iii. that the FPR Committee had proposed that Mr Ben Shipston should join the IADH sub-group.

Endorsed:

i. the recommendations of the sub-group in relation to the lease agreement with Telford & Wrekin Council for the IADH building, noting that negotiations were ongoing and that agreement had not yet been achieved.

ii. the recommendation of the sub-group to expand membership to include Mr Ben Shipston. **JH/LF**

23/32 Date of Next Meeting

Noted:

i. that the next meeting of the Board will be on 25 April 2024, and will take place remotely via MS Teams.

ii. that the meeting of the Board on 4 July 2024 would incorporate an element of an “away day” and that further details would follow. **AP**

23/33 Any Other Business

Noted:

i. that strategic advisory groups would be formed in order to maintain the appropriate level of oversight for Future Farm and Staffing matters following the approved changes to the Board sub-committee structure in November 2023. **KB/AP**

ii. that the Terms of Reference for the Health & Safety Committee had been revised following the approval of the new Board sub-committee structure, and that this committee would be slightly reframed as an operational working group to report to the Audit & Risk Management Committee. **JH/AP**

iii. that members were invited to a 30-minute 1:1 meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, to be arranged to take place between March-May 2024, and that arrangements would follow. **AP**

iv. that the Court of Appeal had handed down its decision in the high-profile appeal from Bristol University, maintaining that the University had discriminated against a disabled student by failing to make appropriate adjustments to its assessment process, which had contributed towards the suicide of a student. The judgment did not address the linked issue of the standard of duty of care owed to students by universities, so although there is now binding case law in relation to assessment methods, the duty of care argument remains untested. Members noted that this case offered clarity for the sector in terms of the level of support required, and the application of the