

1. Introduction and context

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3. Expenditure on additional access and retention measures

10. In setting out our commitments to widen access and support student success, we must recognise that Harper Adams is a small and specialist institution with a unique subject mix and an associated high cost base. All of our provision is currently funded at HEFCE Price Group B. The income derived from the maximum fee level that we are permitted to charge is less than the combined income that we have previously received from HEFCE's teaching grant and the fees which students have paid. This is a different situation for those institutions with largely Price Group C and D provision, as their income will increase if they charge at the top end of the permissible fee range, as virtually all have done. Accordingly, overall absolute expenditure on financial support, access, student success and progression measures will necessarily decline over the next five year period, since both HEFCE grant and tuition fee levels are forecast to decline in real terms and the contribution of fee income constitutes a much larger percentage of an overall declining level of tuition-related income. It will be necessary to focus available funds on those activities that we have evaluated will have most impact on student enrolments, success on-course, progression into employment or further study, for a population that reflects the rural economy that Harper Adams is established to serve. The consequence of this is that the proportion of fee income spent on access agreement activities will decline over time as a result of a combination of these factors to a steady state of 19%, in line with our assessment of our access record (paragraphs 13-17) and affordability.
11. We are not permitted to charge more than £1,800 for the placement year, although we calculate the cost of preparing students for placement and supporting them and employers during the placement year to be in the region of £3,000 a student. Some under-represented and disadvantaged student groups are more challenging to support. We are, nonetheless totally committed to

Assessing our access record

13. Overall, 68% of our new undergraduate enrolments, in each of the 2012/13 and 2013/14 entry cohorts, fall into one or more OFFA-countable categories. Whilst there is no publically available comparative data, we believe that, whilst the majority of our student population is from a rural background, this figure is indicative of a diverse population, with two-thirds of our students facing one sort of challenge or another associated with either disadvantage or under-representation in higher education.
14. Taking each of the targets set out in the accompanying resource plan in turn, we have made progress with some targets, but not with all. The assessment below uses 2009/10 HESA data as the baseline and draws on the most recently published 2012/13 HESA data in assessing the rate of progress thus far. We have also, as part of our initial plans to improve the evaluation framework for our access activities, drawn more heavily on internal data, related to the full-time 2012/13 and 2013/14 entry cohorts, in light of the new funding regime that applies to these students. The rate of progress on each has been considered when determining our planned expenditure on, and related activities for, outreach, retention and financial support arrangements within this agreement. In summary:
 - a. The proportion of all full time undergraduate students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance in 2012/13 **increased** to 19.4% from 15.8% in 2011/12, and in excess of the benchmark of 9.2% (Table T7). It constitutes the eighth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution.
 - b. The proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 **increased** to 46.3% from 44.6%% in 2011/12, against our benchmark of 37.8% (HESA Table T1a). This represents the fourteenth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution and the second highest statistically significant 'over-performance' on the benchmark.
 - c. Our analysis of POLAR 3 data shows that the proportion of young full time entrants from low participation neighbourhoods **fell** to 2.4% against a benchmark of 8.5% (HESA Table T1a). Our own most recent analysis of POLAR 3 data in relation to the rurality of local authorities concludes that, once account has been taken that around 81% of our new entrants are typically from rural backgrounds, where there are high levels of participation, such that only 7.3% of the rural population lives in the lowest participation neighbourhoods, and that of all UK HEIs, only 10.9% of entrants in 2012/13 came from the lowest participation neighbourhoods, our benchmark for entrants from low participation neighbourhoods should be in the order of 5-6%. The 8% target was set at a time when we had not taken into account the rural dimension of our natural catchment and its relationship to neighbourhood participation and, thus, remains challenging for us.

- d. The proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants from state schools or colleges **fell** from 83.2% to 81.0% (HESA Table 1b), against our benchmark of 87.0%. As with the low participation benchmark, this HESA benchmark does not take into account the rural backgrounds of the majority of our new entrants. There is a marked difference in schooling background amongst our rural and urban background students (by over ten percentage points), which reflects, in part, the remoteness of many rural locations from secondary schools, necessitating boarding school education, which is almost totally outside of the state sector. Our rural background students are over twice as likely to have attended an independent school than urban-background students. (2)]TJ 0 6 st1ground4 orte 2fec rcd.990.5 i ntudel ur1.ost

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now actively engaged in activity which has included children from all eight schools visiting Harper Adams University, each for a full day's programme. Each of these schools has high levels of free school meals.

22. One of the key features of the partnership has been provision for the tracking of the progress of the young people we engage with. We have established, with the agreement of the schools and children's parents, a central database which holds the pupil data. We also have the agreement of the primary schools to advise us on the secondary schools to which the participating children progress, so that we can continue to track them and measure progress over the ten years that we might potentially work with them. We, therefore, welcome the proposed development of the National Collaborative Outreach Network and the HEAT tracker system as this may help to us to facilitate tracking across a broader range of our activity.
23. In addition, Harper Adams and Wolverhampton universities have separately agreed, in principle, to work together to develop a programme to raise awareness and aspirations specifically across primary and secondary schools in the Telford and Wrekin authority area, some of which are located in quintile one POLAR 3 low participation neighbourhoods.
24. The university worked in partnership with the Telford and Wrekin Children's University in 2013. This group has now disbanded but we are currently working with its successor organisation, with a view to continue similar work in the future.
25. Another new area that we have begun exploring is the creation of an online resource for teachers to educate them on the career opportunities that exist within the agri-food sectors, so that they can use this information in providing advice and guidance to school pupils within their care; this initiative complements that of the Bright Crop Initiative and is directly linked to the P2HE partnership.
26. A completely new initiative has seen the launch of the Harper Adams Young Innovator of the Year competition. This aims to introduce 11-19 year olds, from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible, to the possibilities of engineering as an exciting subject, leading to a worthwhile career. The competition has been promoted directly to all secondary schools in the country. Its initial success means that we already plan to run the competition again next year and to potentially extend it to other curriculum and career areas. The competition is free to enter, so minimising barriers to entry and shortlisted entrants who are invited to the prize-giving will be offered subsidised travel costs, if that would be a barrier to them attending the competition finals.
27. This is the strategic direction of travel for Harper Adams' outreach activity and is in addition to the established activity which will continue to be developed during the lifetime of this agreement. More specifically this includes:-

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- x Continuing the Harper Adams mentoring scheme which seeks to link a University student with a school pupil who shows potential and who falls within one of the target groups of disadvantage or under-representation. This programme aims to raise aspirations to higher education study and attainment whilst at school.
- x Continuing to support the STEM mentoring scheme with the provision of specialist input related to the land-based sector.
- x Providing and delivering master classes for schools and colleges in our specialist areas.
- x Providing university experience days to schools and colleges, across as broad an audience as possible.
- x Hosting technical event days in the areas of agriculture, engineering, food and land-based studies in order to expose a broader audience to the opportunities offered.
- x Developing innovative ways of reaching a broader and younger audience. For example using public agricultural shows, of which we attend around 20 each year to engage the under-14 age group, particularly at primary age, and raise their basic awareness of career opportunities in the land-based sectors.
- x Using social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, to engage young people pro-actively and develop a two-way dialogue. In particular, we are looking to actively participate in Q&A sessions around particular subjects which young people are most likely engaged with.
- x Developing our student ambassador training to increase their awareness of the need to widen participation and to help them develop the skills needed to advise and guide those from diverse backgrounds and with different initial interests.
- x Building on the innovative approach to advertising established in 2012-13 through an industry-celebrated TV campaign. Specifically, this campaign aims to appeal to the broader population's interest in long-term global food security whilst also raising awareness of the career opportunities this offers and the role of higher education in accessing these opportunities.
- x Continuing to work to create case studies of role models of students and graduates from non-traditional backgrounds who can inspire others, for use in our own promotional material and through the industry-led Bright Crop initiative (www.brightcrop.org.uk).
- x Providing financial support for those with a low household income wishing to attend our summer school (The Harper Adams Experience) and, because we interview all applicants, providing travel bursaries for recent care leavers who are invited to attend for an interview.
- x Actively participate in traditional student recruitment events such as UCAS fairs and school careers fairs. This includes attending city- based events which enable us to promote land-based study and career opportunities to those from outside our more common rural catchment.

- x Providing a combination of full open days and smaller, less intimidating campus tour afternoons, to appeal to as broad a range of individuals and their families as possible.
- x Actively seeking feedback from the pre-applicants and applicants with whom

counselling support, some of whom also suffer with a significant mental health disability. We have reorganised our welfare arrangements so that the Student Services team includes two posts with a specific remit to provide counselling and mental health support, policy development and guidance to other staff. This welfare provision has been very well received and will be extended further and has, undoubtedly, enabled a number of students to continue with their studies, despite significant mental health problems. More generalised support offered through the Student Services team has taken place and will be maintained for the foreseeable future, so that students have easy access to advice and guidance on a range of pastoral, accommodation, health, personal and financial concerns. Planned changes to our chaplaincy service will also strengthen our pastoral support to students further. Inevitably, these services are called upon most heavily by those from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds.

31. As set out in paragraph 14, the University will continue to seek ways in which we can further improve retention rates, particularly for vocationally qualified entrants on Foundation Degrees, who exhibit slightly higher rates of students from under-represented backgrounds, when compared with those on Honours Degree programmes and for mature students. One area of recent curriculum development is the incorporation of practical skills into the formal curriculum. In 2012/13 we also piloted some academic guidance on (i) 2.6 (2Dk)-1.9 (.6 (nt)-6.7 (o)1(26 (at)-6.w [(al)2.0

to enter Higher Education or succeed in it) is not necessarily the most effective way of improving access and student success. Paragraphs 40 to 44 set out our evaluation plans on the impact of the financial support committed to earlier cohorts with a view to make a considered decision on arrangements for 2015/16 entrants.

39. We have sought to assess the impact of our NSP and other bursary schemes, through surveys of all new students, whether or not they were an award recipient, and also through a survey of students in receipt of any type of means tested award. Of award recipients, only three NSP award holders from 52 provided any feedback. Of the 90 respondents (27% response rate) who were award holders of other scheme bursaries, 18% indicated that the award's impact most significantly affected their decision to enter higher education, 12% indicated that the award's most significant impact was on the student's ability to continue beyond their year one studies, with the majority of 70% indicating that the award enabled them to focus on their studies, rather than having to take paid

of the Access Agreement. Monitoring delivery of the activities set out in the Access Agreement and evaluating progress against the targets and milestones will be undertaken through regular reports to the University Executive and the Board of Governors. The Academic Board of the University will also receive an annual report in the autumn term each year. We intend to review our approach to evaluation when the National Access and Student Success Strategy has been considered in detail, so that we can incorporate best practice ideas from that into our own arrangements and so that we can be confident that our access spending is achieving the results we desire. In the interim period, however, we are investing in software upgrades and increased personnel to support the evaluation of impact of our outreach, student success and financial support activities. We have revised the Annual Report (AR)-366 (n)1t r od,Bion ave ac

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Particular attention was given to the balance of available expenditure committed to supporting student success and progression, compared with financial support, and the basis upon which more targeted financial support might best be organised once a clearer evidence base is available.

9. Equality and diversity

53. The University's Single Equality Scheme aims to proactively embed equality in the culture and systems of our organisation by ensuring that policy making,