

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY
ACCESS AGREEMENT – 2016 - 2017

1. Introduction and context
1. The mission of Harper Adams University over the 2015-20 period is to provide, 'World leading higher education and research for the delivery of sustainable food chains and rural economies'. Our vision for 2020 is to be a world leading university in the delivery of sustainable food chains and rural economies.

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. 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 14-17) and affordability. If either the rate of teaching grant or maximum tuition fee declines, we will have to review the commitments herein.

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- a. The proportion of all full time undergraduate students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance in 2013/14 has increased to 18.8% from 15.7% in 2009/10, and in excess of the benchmark of 9.1% (HESA Table T7). It constitutes the eighth highest proportion of any UK higher education institution. With revisions to the Disabled Students' Allowance, we intend to utilise an alternate measure of disability, as set out in Table 7 of the resource plan. We anticipate that, from 2016-17 onwards, few disabled students will benefit from applying for the allowance, as the significant costs associated with supporting disabled students are transferred to institutions. We b2t88.8 (U)6 (ng)-11.3 ()1

16. Overall, therefore, in both absolute and relative terms, we believe that we have made a significant and consistent contribution to both fair access and widening participation. Our performance in terms of student retention and employability underlines the measures we have put in place to support students who may be at risk of academic failure and also, through sandwich placement work experience and the development of employability skills in the curriculum, in preparing our graduates for the world of work.
17. We will work to improve the retention rate of students from lower achieving programme areas, especially those in the 'other undergraduate' category and mature students as identified by our Academic Board. Whilst many students on these programmes enter with modest entry qualifications and some are poorly prepared for HE studies through their level three learning, initial indications are that our work to achieve these improvements is yielding results. We have invested in additional student data analysis and planning capacity which has assisted in identifying other variables, including other student characteristics and curricula design and delivery features, to enable us to better target our work in improving student success outcomes further. This ambition is addressed both through the activities we intend to put in place, as set out in paragraphs 28-32 below, and the milestones and targets set out at Table 7a in the resource plan.

4. Access Measures

Pre-applicant outreach activity

18. The University has always been highly committed to promoting access, not only to Harper Adams, but to the wider land-based and food sectors. The agriculture, food and land-based focus of our course provision traditionally attracts those from farming and/or rural communities with their own demographic characteristics, which are not representative of the wider UK population, as set out in paragraphs 13-17. Whilst we have been extremely effective in supporting students from NS-SEC groups 4-7, and those with disabilities, successfully through their higher education and into professional employment, our o.spd

programme, with the winning team receiving a fun, off-road vehicle experience day at Harper Adams. Year 12 students also experience a HE taster day.

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- Actively seeking feedback from the pre-applicants and applicants with whom we engage to enable us to review and develop communications activities to ensure that they appeal to as broad an audience as possible, and in particular, obtain feedback on ways of better reaching students from under-represented groups.

27. We are particularly keen, wherever possible, to link HE study options with career opportunities and are particularly pleased when we are able to organise our outreach activities in partnership with a range of employers. For example, in addition to the Bright Crop Initiative and the JCB Academy work, we are working with the Worshipful Company of Butchers to run hands-on food processing workshops for school children. Our Animals Production, Welfare and Veterinary Sciences department is working with the Birmingham City Council, by contributing to the 'Animal Magic' in-school programme in deprived areas of Birmingham. Our Engineering department has long-established links with the Douglas Bomford Trust (which seeks to advance the application of engineering and physical science to land based activities for the sustainable benefit of the environment and mankind) to host an annual conference promoting world-wide careers in agricultural engineering.

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

28. The University provides high levels of post-entry support to students. All new students are offered screening, during induction to Harper Adams, to assess whether they might be dyslexic and to gauge the extent to which they will require additional support to develop their numeracy skills. The University has a specialist team of nine, to provide bespoke Learner Support to students, and there are plans to augment this team further based on a performance gap analysis and intervention impact assessment. The tutors will work with targeted students either individually or in small groups, in order to meet increased student need and demand. The support includes specialist assistance to those disabled students, targeted study skills support for students with level 3 vocational qualifications, as well as numeracy support. Our experience is that, where students take up this service, they benefit from it, through improved confidence, better developed academic study skills and consequent improved achievement levels. With better data on 'at risk' groups, this team will be able to target those individual students who might benefit from the support of this team.

29. In addition, the University's Student Services team provides non-academic advice, guidance and support to all students, on a range of personal and financial matters. We have experienced a growing number of students requiring counselling support, some of whom also suffer with a significant mental health disability. We have reorganised our welfare arrangements so that the Student Services team includes two 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.

in 2012, the number holding both A levels and BTECs at 110% of 2012 levels and whilst the number holding A levels only will be at 95% of the 2012 levels). Analysis of our BTEC entrants' characteristics is that they are more likely to be from an under-represented group than A level entrants (specifically, in relation to a greater likelihood of being a disabled, mature or LPN entrant). Accordingly, we will continue to develop our pre- and on-programme of work, whereby a small team of Academic Guidance Tutors work closely with Senior Tutors to provide targeted support to BTEC entrants in their first year of study.

31. We have invested in software upgrades that will better enable us to monitor the relative achievement of students, not only at an individual level, but also those with different characteristics, so that we are able to plan more targeted interventions where necessary, whilst avoiding stigmatising any new support programmes we might develop. In 2014, we created a new post of Student Data and Planning Analyst, which has increased our capacity to make better evidence-informed decisions to target our resources on activities that are most likely to yield results. We believe that these programmes of support, intended to improve student retention so that it is above, rather than around, our benchmarks (in spite of very inclusive entry requirements, including high proportions of vocationally qualified entrants and high levels of student disability), mean that we are appropriately resourced for an institution of this size and available funds. Our most recent assessment is that students who took up this sort of support had a 7% greater chance of success than those who did not.
32. We have a commitment to improve the on-course success rates of all our students, including those who are considered 'OFFA-countable'. Our initial analysis of student achievement variables confirms that receipt of means-tested financial support is not yet proven to be effective in improving chances of success. Our assessment to date is that other factors such as age on entry, disability and type of entry qualification are more significant determinants of success. Our increased capacity for identifying possible causal relationships will enable us to better target the work of our educational development and quality enhancement team. This small team works with academic and academic services staff to revise approaches to curriculum design and learning, teaching and assessment strategies and, inevitably, work that benefits less represented or disadvantaged groups tends to benefit all students.

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

33. The rural skills module that is integral to the curriculum for many Foundation Degree students, in support of their preparation for placement success, is augmented by an extra-curricular Land-based Skills Programme, incorporating work-related skills, leading to externally accredited 'licence to practise' qualifications for all student groups. This support serves to motivate students within their transition to higher education and enables them to be well prepared for placement learning and subsequent post-graduation employment. These programmes are expensive to provide and are offered at significantly subsidised rates so that cost is not a barrier to participation.
34. Of key importance to our success in consistently securing sector-leading levels of graduate employment is the work that we do to support students in their year-long placement period. In addition to the skills programmes (paragraph 31), all students are supported in a pre-placement programme, with input from dedicated placement staff, as well as through on-placement support provided by placement tutors. Placement tutors visit all students whilst on placement, are a source of guidance, and provide advice on the completion of assessment tasks which are intended to link campus-based studies with their professional practice, as well as encourage them to take responsibility for personal development planning, in preparation for graduate employment.

35. We are also committed to better understanding the career outcomes of students on the basis of their characteristics, including in relation to professional and managerial employment and starting salaries. Where we identify that particular groups are not achieving their potential at the same rate as others, we will identify 'at risk' students and offer targeted support, in a similar way that we plan to organise advice and mentoring support for academic and social success. We shall organise this advice and mentoring support through the Careers Advisory Service and Placement Office and are considering the benefits of joining the National Mentoring Service. We have also commenced a programme of work to highlight to undergraduate students the benefits that postgraduate study might confer on them, in both employment outcomes and in relation to personal development and plan to continue with this, including through some financial incentives (although not OFFA-countable).

36. Our Careers Service provides group and individualised support to students and recent alumni, working with our Career Network of employers (see paragraph 6.2.6.1) and (see paragraph 6.2.6.2).

45. Information about tuition fees and scholarships will also be made available to both UCAS and Student Finance, in order that students can access this information from the websites of UCAS and Student Finance.

8. Consulting with students

46. A draft of this agreement was shared and discussed with the SU President and the SU Support Officer. Discussion on the final agreement with the other elected student representatives who sit on Academic Board was not possible in person because of the timing of the board meeting and the submission deadline of the agreement, although all student representatives were given an opportunity to comment on the final draft.

9. Equality and diversity

47. The University's Single Equality Scheme aims to proactively embed equality in the culture and systems of our organisation by ensuring that policy making, service delivery and employment practice are all equality orientated. A proactive and systematic approach to undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) is in place for existing and new policies. Our Access Agreement has been subject to an EIA, undertaken by a key member of the Equality and Diversity Working Group.

48. The University's Equality and Diversity working group, made up of staff and students from across the institution, has continued its work to support the delivery of our Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan. Our Scheme continues to focus on ensuring that as many as possible of the agreed actions are equally applicable to our policies and procedures for supporting staff and students so that we have a "whole institution" approach to promoting and ensuring equality and diversity.

49. A number of activities that foster better awareness amongst the University community of equality and diversity issues have taken place during the year, including a continuation of training and development for staff focusing on how to support those who may have on-going or temporary mental health needs. Training in interview techniques has also been delivered, which is important as virtually all undergraduates are invited to the campus to meet with staff and students and participate in an interview. As in previous years, all new staff are required to take and pa.38 0 Td ()Tj -0[(,)-6.6 (w)13.5 (hi)2.7 (c)-2 Tc -2(t)-6.6 (ec)-2 (hni)2.6

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Table 6 – Summary tables (on expenditure)

Table 7a – Statistical targets and milestones relating to applicants, entrants or student body

Table 7b - Other milestones and targets