

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY
ACCESS AGREEMENT – 2018-2019

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'

universities and choose to work with those with a broad-based offer who are within easy travelling distance. We have committed to provide up to six 'Fee-Free' Success Scholarships for applicants who meet postcode, household income and other criteria related to characteristics of under-representation and which we believe will provide a catalyst to spark their interest in the possibility of higher education which leads to a rewarding career in the industries which we serve.

Assessing our access record

13. In 2016/17, 70% of our total home / EU full-time undergraduate population falls into one or more OFFA-countable categories. Seventy four percent of new students in 2016/17 are disadvantaged or under-represented, compared with 73% in 2015/16. We believe that, whilst the majority of our student population is from a rural background, these figure are indicative of a diverse population, with over two-thirds of our students facing one sort of challenge or another associated with either disadvantage or under-representation in higher education.
14. Our land-based specialism results in a predominantly rural, national catchment. Typically, around 82% of our new entrants are from a rural background, compared with 19% of the population according to the 2011 census. This affects: (1) our ability to attract students from low participation neighbourhoods, as low participation neighbourhoods are overwhelmingly urban, and also; (2) reflects how remote, rural inhabitants are more likely to attend boarding schools, which are predominantly independent of the state sector. This distorts our performance indicators related to state schooling and neighbourhood background using the POLAR 3 categorisation, and is a consequence of our rural catchment, in line with our institutional mission. Most mature students study with us on a part-time basis on unregulated programmes which are outside the scope of this agreement. Our access targets, therefore, take account of our mission and associated catchment, as well as a whole student life cycle approach, in relation to relative levels of on-course success and post-course progression. In relation to the targets that we have outlined in Table 7 of the resource plan:
 - a. The proportion of all full time undergraduate students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance in 2015/16 was 18.2%, in excess of the benchmark of 9.8% (HESA Table T7). It constitutes the sixth highest proportion of any English 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 2018-19 onwards, fewer disabled students will benefit from applying for the allowance, as the significant costs associated with supporting disabled students are transferred to institutions. We consider that maintaining levels of access by disabled students at 19% will be very challenging, based on the concerns we have heard from disabled applicants concerned about the changes to funded support. In 2015/16, the University's own internal data shows 21.1% of all home/EU students were disabled.
 - b. The proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7 was at 46.8% in 2014/15, against our benchmark of 39.5% (HESA Table T1b). This represented the nineteenth

student retention and employability underlines the measures we have put in place to support

White, working class boys

20. The West Midlands widening participation cohort is predominantly composed of the white, working class. The problem of low progression rates from school to HEI's amongst white, working class males is well documented¹.

Whilst there has to be a recognition that the barriers to attainment (and, thus, progression) for this group are complex, ingrained and unlikely to be overcome by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) alone, the predominance of this challenging group in our region, means that they must remain a key target, notwithstanding that our 2016 entry intake constituted 23% white, working class males (in socio-economic classification groups 4-7). About a Boy from the National Educational Opportunities Network² (page 3) recommends that: "The key to address this is the active engagement of schools working in partnership with HE". A key feature of Harper Adams' approach is to recognise the challenge, and to build strategic partnerships and programmes of engagement and interventions over time, which address the following:

1. Mentors

We have reviewed our own profile of student ambassadors and have identified that it is less 'working class' and less 'male' than the rest of our student body and will look to address this.

2. Sport

Given our students' success in many sports, particularly rugby and motorsport the potential of using sport as a way of engaging with the white, working class, male audience will be explored.

3. Relevant and accessible subject 'entry points'

On the assumption that there will be certain areas of our offer that spark interest with members of the target group, such as Engineering, which is the 'home' of the Harper Rally Team (a very successful team on the national stage), these aspects of the offer can be utilised more strongly than others within the programme of interventions. For example, the university will be hosting a pan-European Field Robotic Machine Event and programmes of engagement with target schools could involve building and operating their own vehicles, for example.

4. Career and life opportunities

Career opportunities are a key area for focus in widening participation programmes, especially in highlighting the value of HE as a way of advancing and improving circumstances. With our exceptional record of graduate employability, this remains a key theme to be further explored and exploited.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities specific to our specialist subject areas

21. A sound understanding of the broad themes of our subject areas are central to the effort of encouraging under-represented groups to progress to higher education at Harper Adams, so we have reviewed research² into the views of young people concerning food production and the countryside. This key report pointed to growing levels of disengagement from the countryside and a poor level of awareness and understanding of farms, farmers and food production. Most interestingly: "Among those living in rural areas, only one in three consider themselves to be residents of the

of our programmes and the ambition to ensure all new students are well prepared to understand course and industry requirements, we have been cautious to change successful arrangements. Our analysis has, however, highlighted that less traditional applicants to our courses are less confident in interview situations and are less able to secure the minimum levels of work experience on some courses that we have considered vital. Accordingly, we have made some changes to our established arrangements, in order to minimise barriers, as follows:

1. We have created an Access to Agriculture Programme through which normal work experience requirements are adjusted, on a case-by-case basis, for those from under-represented groups, so that applicants are able to fully satisfy the entry requirements with support through access to a Mentor, fully funded practical skills qualifications (for example in tractor and telehandler training, pesticide use and animal handling), alongside access to established employers with whom we closely work. Whilst we will carefully monitor the outcomes for Programme participants, we are confident that this support will enable students to succeed and progress, in line with other students, despite the adjustments made to entry requirements.
2. Admissions processes have been modified, so that successful completion of an admissions interview, on-campus, is no longer a requirement across all course areas for all candidates. Alternative, voluntary Offer Holder Days are provided for post-offer candidates who are encouraged to attend so that they may meet with staff and students to ensure they are clear on course requirements and associated support arrangements.

Outreach Programme

27. Harper Adams' refreshed outreach programme will feature high levels of partnership working with other HEPs and with schools in order to build impact as cost effectively as possible. We will be offering a wide range of on and off-campus events based around projects or large scale events alongside Information, Advice and Guidance sessions. Whilst our outreach offer will be made available to any school or college, the provision will be tailored around a 3-tier approach, depending on the depth of strategic engagement with each school partner.

28. Our outreach programmes will focus on a range of topics relevant to the land and food based sectors in which the university specialises. These projects will complement the outreach work of the Higher Horizons + National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), which is co-located with the Harper Adams' outreach team. Our aim is to maximise the impact of our combined work, to achieve value for money, with the limited resources available. We will also be working collaboratively on programmes with the Widening Participation Collaborative Group (WCPG), Smallpeice Trust, Royal Society of Entomology, the Engineering Council's Big Bang programme and Explore Primary, as well as the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP) in support of our impact evaluation work. The latter will be invaluable since our small scale of operation makes the HEAT tracker software, funded

Hub will be working with 22 schools. We will work with the Hub to organise our programme of outreach work within those schools and communities that do not qualify for NCOP support.

Widening Participation Collaborative Group (WPCG)

30. We are actively engaged in collaboration with other HEPs in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the North West as the Widening Participation Collaborative Group. The partner institutions work collaboratively to organise and deliver campus visits to target schools, as well as targeted events for young people in care.

Smallpeice Trust

31. This is a programme based on engineering and delivered on campus in partnership with a charity which specialises in encouraging young people into careers in engineering. One of the areas currently in development is around 'women in engineering' and 'white, working class boys'. To complement this activity, the NCOP will be actively promoting the event to the eligible students within their target schools. In 2016/17, 64 students attended.

Entosci

32. This is an on-campus event run in collaboration with the Royal Entomological Society for schools and colleges. The event ran for the first time in 2016 and, as a "world first", was a huge success, with over 200 individuals in attendance, of whom 51% were from POLAR Quintile 1 or 2 wards. Harper Adams will look to actively promote and encourage attendance from individuals in Key Stages 4 - 5

Big Bang

33. Working in collaboration with Engineering Council's Big Bang programme and the NCOP, we will be holding a large on-campus event, intended to inspire school children to study STEM subjects. Previous Big Bang events have attracted 1,000+ students and we are committed to achieving similarly high levels of participation.

Explore Primary :

34. The initiative is currently entering its fifth year and is due to end in June 2018. The current provision is across Year 5 and Year 6 and has been very effective in enabling each year group to receive two interactions per year, one being an Information Advice and Guidance session and the other a visit to Harper Adams. Harper Adams hopes that the programme will continue but is committed to continuing the work even if the partnership does not continue beyond 2018. We have worked with around 450 students so far over the four years, in contributing to the partnership total of 1,800 participants.

Strategic Programme of Intervention in Partnership with Schools

35. Harper Adams has developed an intensive and personal programme that will aim to raise aspirations and awareness of Higher Education and sectors / careers that initially may not have been recognised by individuals. The overall project will run across the next five years and will work with years 5 to 13. This project will be broken down into three tiers as outlined below. These tiers should enable Harper Adams to set attainment targets with the highest tier of partner and monitor progression as well as providing more effective interactions with students.

36. The university has identified a secondary school (within Quintile 3 but with very high levels of disadvantaged students (for example, 47% eligible for free school meals⁶ against a national average of 26%) and a feeder primary school in Quintile 1 as part of our planned Tier 1 school partnership work. The secondary school's attainment and progression levels are also below the average in the local authority. These two schools will have a very intensive outreach package, the framework for which, is outlined in Table 1. We have also identified ten other schools based in Quintile 1-3 neighbourhoods which will be offered the package of outreach summarised in Table 2.

⁶ 16-18 pupil data accessed via Gov.UK webpages

Table 1 Tier 1 School Partners' Outreach Framework

Tier 1 – Feeder primary school and Secondary school				
Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9

Evaluation of Impact of Outreach Work

37. The University is developing a multi-faceted evaluation framework for the outreach activities outlined above, evaluating their impact in increasing overall HE participation and the widening participation objectives of this University, specifically. The University has established that, presently, the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) tool is unaffordable. However, through a combination of investment in partnerships and more precise use of the University's, and other, existing datasets (including from planned investment in a Customer Relationship Management database), a robust evaluation framework is in place, as follows:

Key Evaluation Partnerships

38. NCOP: Through the NCOP hub, the University will engage in, HEFCE's evaluation programme for NCOPs led by CFE Research. While the work of the NCOP does not contribute directly to the Access Agreement, the University is of the view that there will be a lot to be learnt from this evaluation programme, applicable to all outreach work.

39. EMWPREP: Harper Adams is investing in the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP), which is a collaboration of nine Midlands-based universities, "...that provides a targeting, mon.9 (s)-2 (i)2.66 0.310.5 (r)-5.T52 -1.13 ABn2.6 (t) (des)ion oAEP

entrants were categorised as high tariff and many of these were BTEC holders. BTEC awards are known to be over-valued in tariff terms and, notably, HEFCE considers all BTEC entrants to be at high risk of early leaving, and is one of the reasons why we have developed extensive on-course support. We admit all students who we believe will succeed, including those with no level three academic qualifications, for whom we offer extended year preparatory programmes. We also offer Foundation Degrees which require modest entry qualifications and, for those who perform well, we enable them to transfer to Honours Degrees. As one of the smallest English universities with an expensive, specialist subject base to resource, and with no existing teacher training expertise nor management experience of 14-19 education, we are unable to redirect front-line funds to support further school sponsorship and management arrangements (noting our support of the JCB Academy since 2010) intended to raise attainment across a broad-based, level three curriculum. Additionally, as a university with inclusive entry requirements, we are unlikely to recoup any financial investment that would accrue from improved level three attainment, as would be the case for a highly selective entry provider. Notwithstanding these challenges, we recognise that aspiration and attainment raising should complement each other and that we are able to make a contribution to the work to raise attainment in schools and workplaces. Our planning has not been fully completed since we need further discussion and formal agreement with partners. The attainment raising work that is under discussion with three partners is summarised in paragraphs 45-47. Table 7a sets out a key provisional output target for 2018/19. The associated quantified attainment outcome targets are still under active discussion and 'sign-off' by our partner's leadership team.

STEM Crest Awards

45. We have been working with a small number of local pupils and supported them through Silver and Gold STEM Crest awards. We are in discussion with our key secondary partner school to establish a more strategic approach to offering access to the Crest award scheme by identified pupils, across each level. We believe that exposure to interesting research projects and completion of the demands of the awards will better prepare year 9-13 pupils for entry to Higher Education in STEM subjects and that completion of the Silver and Gold awards will strengthen the personal statements of those who chose to apply to highly selecting universities, including possible integration with level three Extended Project Qualifications. Attainment raising targets with our Tier 1 secondary school are under active discussion. The working plans that we are actively discussing, for each academic year are as follows:

1. Four year 10 pupils will successfully complete the Silver STEM Crest Award (30 hours each) through our laboratories,

51. In preparing for the changes to the financial support available to disabled students from 2016/17 onwards, and in order to improve the success chances of all students, including those with other characteristics of disadvantage, the Academic Board approved policy and guidance for inclusive teaching and assessment er

in preparation for assessment test centres used in graduate recruitment. The Careers Service runs a programme called 'Becoming a Professional' in order to raise the aspirations and preparedness of all our leavers to enter professional and managerial positions, where this fits in with their life plans.

57. Although most of our graduates seek to enter employment, as opposed to postgraduate level study, we have introduced a bursary scheme for our own graduates who might aspire to go on to full-time postgraduate level study, including a very generous award (fully funded fees) for those who achieve a first class honours degree. Whilst this scheme does not fall within the scope of the access agreement's 'countable' spend, we believe it illustrates our commitment to support students into employment areas that require postgraduate level qualifications. Our postgraduate curriculum is organised on week day block delivery which enables students to easily access study at level seven whilst in full-time employment. This mode of delivery is probably at least as helpful in facilitating access to postgraduate studies for under-represented groups as is the provision of financial support, whether the latter is in the form of University support or the new Postgraduate Loan Scheme.

Financial support to students who enter in 2018 /19

58. We have no plans to offer solely means-tested bursaries or fee waivers beyond those offered to the 2014/15 and earlier entry cohorts. We remain unconvinced that modest levels of means-tested financial support activity have either improved access to higher education or student success outcomes significantly enough to justify the cost, although we will continue to review available evidence. On the basis of our recent experiences in managing our hardship fund, we also have concerns about the financial health of middle household income students, who were not eligible for maintenance grants nor significant maintenance loans. We, therefore, plan to continue offering hardship funds in 2017/18 and will continue to monitor the demand for such, and evaluate their impact, in planning for 2018/19. Accordingly, the 2018/19 agreement includes provision for a hardship fund in 2017/18, but does not make a commitment beyond 2017/18. We have launched a new Full Fees Merit Scholarship solely for those from backgrounds which are under-represented at Harper Adams University. We intend to offer six Scholarship awards for 2018/19 entrants and to promote the scheme heavily through schools and colleges with poor progression rates to higher education. Target schools and colleges will include those that we currently work with and also others that further analysis determines will find our subject mix of interest to their pupils. Our hope is that the availability of six awards, which provide full fee waivers to the value of £9,250 a year (£1,850 during the sandwich year), will inspire pupils from under-represented groups to give serious consideration to Harper Adams University and to work hard to achieve excellent results, to provide a solid basis for higher education studies. We have promoted these awards for 2017/18 entry and, on the assumption that our evaluation deems that they have been successful in attracting candidates who would not otherwise have considered either Harper Adams University or higher education at all, will continue to offer six awards for successive entry cohorts. If our evaluation determines that the availability of these awards does not enable us to extend our reach into target schools and colleges beyond our existing engagement programme, we will reconsider the Scheme and reflect this in subsequent access agreements.

59. Harper Adams also invests significant effort into generating scholarship funds through its Development Trust, predominantly through securing industry-sponsored awards, some of which are also linked to salaried placement or employment opportunities. In 2016/17, 106 awards to the value of £400,000, funded by 70 sponsors, were distributed to students primarily in their second year of studiesw extl.-3(£)o2oeshe/r y

1. Evaluating the extent to which the recipients of the funds meet OFFA-countable criteria. For example, 81% of 2016/17 Development Trust awards were made to students with at least one characteristic of disadvantage.
2. Evaluating the access, retention, progression and success of recipients, where applicable, and benchmarking both against a comparable control group, and also against recipients' previous performance (eg in first year) as an indicator of 'added-value'. Outcome measures include:
 - a. Retention into second year, and progression beyond.
 - b. Ass

64. All applicants seeking admission to a course at Harper Adams University are invited to the campus for either an interview or to attend an Offer Holder Day and this provides an opportunity for students to ask questions of the Student Financial Support Officer. A copy of the University's information on fees and charges will also be sent to all applicants receiving an offer of a place at the University.

8. Consulting with