

ROYAL AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

CORPORATE PLAN 2010-14

November 2010

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CORPORATE PLAN 2010 to 2014

Section 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Royal Agricultural College is a University College specialising in the provision of Higher Education (HE) relating to industries and professions in the rural economy and global food supply chain. The College has provided taught programmes at degree level since 1984, and achieved degree-awarding powers in 1995. It remained in the private sector from its inception in 1845 until 2001, when it became publicly funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).
- 1.2 The College has been involved in agriculture and land and business management since its establishment. The number of jobs in agriculture has declined over the years as the number of production units has decreased, but the skills required have increased and there are increasing management employment opportunities along the national and global food chain in financing, transportation and storage, processing, wholesaling and retailing of food. Also, expansion has taken place in sectors of the rural economy associated with agriculture, including tourism, property, and equine management, and appreciation of the role of land in the management of water, the environment and ecosystem services has grown significantly. The College has responded to these changes by extending its provision into these sectors. The College has also developed, over many years, strong international links and reputation, which it continues to develop through teaching, research and consultancy.
- 1.3 The College mission is:
'To be the centre of excellence for developing the leaders of tomorrow in sustainable development relating to the rural economy and food chain, and to provide leadership regionally, nationally and internationally through its education, research and knowledge exchange activities'.
- 1.4 The last Corporate Plan was produced for the period 2009-13, and strategy is updated annually through the Annual Monitoring Statement and the Corporate Planning Statement for HEFCE. In addition, a Sustainability Framework was produced in January 2007, which examined forward strategy for the next 10 years with particular emphasis on academic, estates, staffing and financial projections.
- 1.5 This Corporate Plan encompasses the strategy outlined in the Sustainability Framework and has four core strategic themes – Teaching and Learning; Research and Consultancy; Business Development; and Commercial Activities plus three cross-cutting themes of – Human Resources; Estates; and Finance (Appendix 1).

Section 2. Strategic Aims

The College pursues its mission with the following aims:

- To provide innovative and challenging programmes, delivered through differing means in a stimulating learning environment internally and externally to the College, at foundation degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, that meet the needs of industry and across society
- To develop a research and consultancy capacity at strategic, applied and translational levels for the benefit of businesses and organisations nationally and internationally, and which supports the educational activities of the College
- To exchange knowledge widely with peers, clients, the industries we serve, decision makers, and the general public, and in particular to businesses in the region, through professional development and business support activities
- To develop profitable commercial activities that promote the educational activities of the College, and which provide additional income for the College
- To build on the legacy of philanthropic support for the work of the College
- To attract, develop and retain the best employees, treat them justly and equally, support and encourage them to achieve their maximum capabilities, and reward them fairly for their work
- To provide outstanding facilities to support and enhance the academic, student experience and commercial aims of the College, and to manage the resources efficiently and effectively
- To manage a profitable and sustainable College business using effective financial processes which are rigorous and compliant with the College's financial regulations
- To manage the developments of the College in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner
- To continue to develop the reputation of the College regionally, nationally, and internationally through the excellence of its activities

The College will continue to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) for its strategic aims to assist the Executive and Governors in their management, leadership and governance responsibilities.

Section 3. Responding to the External Environment

3.1 Policies in agriculture, the rural economy and the food chain

Agriculture, rural businesses and the food industries in both developed and developing countries are changing rapidly, driven by globalisation, population growth, environmental pressures and the use of new technologies. The importance of food security and climate change, with the associated energy and water issues, is now recognised as a major influence on national and international policies for agriculture and land use

in the future. There is a continuing and urgent requirement for higher education to provide leadership, training and solutions to these problems.

- 3.1.1 The present UK political framework was set out by the Policy Commission on 'The Future of Farming and Food' led by Sir Don Curry and by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA_ in their 'Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food'. They proposed how the sector might contribute dynamically to the rural economy, whilst at the same time delivering the environmental goals demanded by the public. The College readily embraces these objectives in its education, research and consultancy, but is aware that current policies are likely to evolve rapidly in the face of new agenda and a plethora of reports and recommendations relating to the impacts of climate change, the increased pressures on land-use globally brought about by population growth, changes in patterns of food consumption, the need for energy crops, climate change and declining water reserves. The Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published a new food strategy in January 2010 (Food 2030; how do we get there) which sets the tone and priorities for UK food production in a global context. The current strategic plan for the major public research funder, The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council [BBSRC] published in January 2010 has food security at its heart. A Foresight Report into Food Security from the office of the Government Chief Scientist was published in early 2010 and a further Foresight Report, on Land Use will be published later in 2010.
- 3.1.2 The impact of agriculture on the environment through, for example, greenhouse gas emission (GHGs), is a developing issue for the industry. The need to both adapt and mitigate climate change will impact on food production in many ways, including food quality, food safety, local food production and sustainable production systems, as well as influencing the debate on non-food crops for biomass, biofuels and biogas production. Teaching, research and knowledge exchange activities in these areas will become a major priority, and the College will continue to adapt its teaching, research, knowledge exchange, and campus provisions to take up these challenges.
- 3.1.3 Changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in particular the decoupling of subsidies from production and the introduction of the single farm payment (SFP) are increasingly exposing businesses to the global market place. This is leading on the one hand to larger intensive agricultural units producing mostly commodity products, and on the other to diversification of agricultural businesses into the production of value-added products and the development of property and alternative land use enterprises. These changes have implications for the College Farms' strategy, for knowledge exchange activities, as well as for teaching, research and consultancy.
- 3.1.4 The increased importance of agriculture and the use of land is being reflected in significant increase in interest in these subjects at the College. Previously, downturns in the agricultural industry had seen a reduction in the number of students applying to UK universities for degrees in agriculture and related subjects. In 2005, HEFCE set up a

Land-based Studies Review Group to consider the strategic importance of land-based studies, and the risks to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) involved in its teaching; in particular, the risks for small, specialist institutions (monotechnics) such as RAC were considered. The Group reported in 2007 and its recommendations, particularly those around collaboration between the monotechnics and other HE partners, are reflected in College strategy. After a period where the funding council (HEFCE) did not include agriculture and food as strategically important subjects within higher education, recent support for these subjects through the University modernisation Fund has indicated a welcome review of that approach.

- 3.1.5 Departments of Agriculture in pre-1992 universities have tended to move into more basic and strategic research, influenced by Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) targets, and to move their missions away from the applied aspects of agricultural systems. There is coincidentally a widely accepted view that there is a gap in the application, or translation, of research into agriculture, and the Government Chief Scientist has, through his Food Research Partnership, identified translation as a priority. It is the expectation that the research Excellence framework (REF), the replacement for the RAE, will take more account of the impact of research on society, a criterion that allies more with the mission of the College. The BBSRC, in line with the other research councils, is also emphasising the importance of impact and applicability in research funding.
- 3.1.6 At the same time, some further education (FE) agricultural colleges have entered partnership agreements with universities for HE provision in agriculture and related subjects (about 40% of land-based undergraduate provision is in FE colleges). Others have moved away from agriculture, and extended their missions outside the traditional areas in order to sustain student numbers. The College has established and developing links with a number of FE Colleges to serve this particular sector which will grow in importance.
- 3.1.7 The College continues to recruit strongly in agriculture, food and agribusiness, and land management programmes, and a significant number of graduates continue to take employment in these industries. Diversification of the College's mission in subjects relating to the food chain and the rural economy will continue, and increase the range of career prospects for the College's graduates.
- 3.1.8 The period of the middle 2000s saw an increase in undergraduate student numbers in Rural Land Management and, at foundation degree and undergraduate levels, in Property and Property Agency and Marketing. These degrees, together with the MScs in Rural Estate Management and International Real Estate, are taught within the partnership agreement with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Many of these students, which represent about half the students in the College, will become chartered surveyors. The recent perturbations in the property market have produced changes in applications for property-related programmes, but recruitment remains strong both numerically and in quality. The number of students on the BSc (Hons) Business Management also doubled in the same period.

- 3.1.9 The food chain, stretching from farm to consumer, employs almost 10% of the country's workforce, and accounts for 8% of the national economy. The rural economy, in addition to agriculture also accounts for a significant workforce in tourism, recreation, countryside management, property management, and an expanding equine industry. The College mission is therefore linked to about 15% of the UK workforce, and graduate employment does not present any significant problems (only 2-3% of RAC graduates are still looking for work six months after graduation, placing the College in the top echelon of HEIs). The introduction of a new undergraduate degree in food production and supply management in 2008/09 has further enhanced the range of food-related programmes, attracting both HEU and overseas students.
- 3.1.10 Globalisation of the food industry, the impact of emerging economies, the power of major retailers and consumerism are some of the drivers giving rise to the increased interest in international business relating to the food industry as a subject in HE. This is an area of strength at postgraduate level in the College, with potential to attract increasing numbers of overseas students, as exemplified by the International MBA in Food and Agribusiness offered in collaboration with Utah State University, the Africa Fellowship Trust supporting the African Land and Food Fellows studying on the postgraduate International Rural Development programme at the College, and the postgraduate programme in international Real Estate which attracts significant numbers of overseas students. In addition the College has developed strong partnerships in China, specifically with Shandong Agricultural University (SDAU), to deliver teaching in-country, programmes that are highly regarded by the Chinese Government.

3.2 Policies in higher education

Government policy, the current HEFCE Strategic Plan, and the debate over the future plans for research assessment, will continue to be influential in refining College policy. The Land-Based Studies Review in 2007, commissioned by HEFCE, continues to have strategic implications for the RAC. 'Higher Ambitions', published by Government in November 2009, highlighting amongst other things, quality of teaching, links with industry, internationalisation and widening participation.

The election of a new Government in 2010, together with the current review by Government of all publically funded activity, held in the context of the national and global economic climate, will have very significant impact on strategy throughout the higher education sector. Reductions in grant have already been felt within 2009/10. The Comprehensive Spending Review announced in October contained reductions in HE funding of some 40%. Subsequent announcements of increases in the fee levels that universities may charge students from 2012/13 to a maximum of £9000 have yet to be approved by Parliament. A White Paper for higher education which will contain the details supporting Government policy is expected early in 2011, but is unlikely to be realised as a Bill before Parliament until the spring of 2012. In the absence of detail the College will

review all the factors affecting the sector, and more specifically the RAC and its students, in agreeing fee levels and its responses to the major changes in funding for higher education planned by Government.

- 3.2.1 Whilst HEFCE recognises the value of diversity in the provision of higher education in England, there have been pressures for smaller HE institutions to develop partnerships with other institutions. The College has a strong commitment to retaining its identity and independence. It has a strongly recognised brand, and will increase the size and prominence of its academic business through partnerships. The College will continue to explore opportunities to collaborate further with other HE institutions, including particularly those within the land-based sector and the region, and with its partner FE Colleges. The College also recognises the increasing role of the private provision of higher education in the United Kingdom, and will explore opportunities in this country and overseas to widen its portfolio of educational activities. The College will continue to develop its strong brand internationally and build on the links it has, such as those in China, Africa, the USA and continental Europe.
- 3.2.2 The Leitch Review of Skills (Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – world class skills) commissioned by the UK Government and reporting in 2007, recommended that 40% of the adult working population should have level 4 skills by 2020 compared with 29% in 2005, and has changed the HE focus from the 18-30 age range. This will require increased engagement and investment from employers in HE. The College, with its positioning close to the businesses it serves, will be in a strong position to collaborate with employers in such joint ventures. The award by HEFCE of a substantial grant [REEDNET], in conjunction with Harper Adams University College, another land-based HEI, to further develop accredited programmes in conjunction with industry, is further enhancing the Colleges employer engagement.
- 3.2.3 Expansion of student numbers is necessary to develop the College and its sustainability; a focus on international students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels will develop the links the College already has with a number of overseas universities, notably China, Africa and the USA, though it is recognised that this is an increasingly competitive market. Publically-funded home and European (HEU) undergraduate numbers are constrained by HEFCE, though in a welcome move the Funding Council funded an additional cohort of 50 agriculture students for entry in 2010, recognising that the subject was now a strategically important subject. It remains unclear following recommendations in the Browne Review as to how control on publically funded student numbers will be exercised by Government in the future. Applications to the College saw a significant rise for the academic years 2008/09, 2009/10 and again for 2010/11. Foundation degrees for HEU students, incorporating significant work-based learning, and Honours Years for students progressing from foundation degrees, have formed and will continue to be a significant component of the programme offering at the College. The College will continue to work with its FE College partners to deliver foundation degrees; the particular nature of the industries that the College serves

makes such qualifications particularly relevant and current indications suggest that this type of provision is supported by Government.

- 3.2.4 Government and HEFCE policy to increase and widen participation in higher education, which receives even greater emphasis in the proposed fee arrangements, is supported by the College. It is inevitable that the mission of the College leads to a high proportion of students being recruited from rural backgrounds. However substantial efforts are also made to target students from low recruitment, urban areas, and from different socio-economic groups, through Aim Higher and other programmes. For example the College has successfully run for the past three years a Young City Farmers residential summer school to introduce urban students to rural studies. Our objectives in this area form part of the Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) enabling the College to charge current student fees.
- 3.2.5 Competition in the recruitment of overseas students has increased; this is partly due to competition between UK HEIs, and partly to overseas universities becoming increasingly competitive on price, and language of tuition. The College is committed to the internationalisation of its programmes and has increased its cohort of overseas students to some 16% of total student numbers in 2010/11, from over 30 different countries. The College intends to increase its overseas student numbers further, through developing partnerships with overseas universities and colleges, and increasing the number of active agents in its global network. These initiatives contribute to the development of an inclusive and diverse culture, part of the mission of the College. The current arrangements with Shandong Agricultural University (SDAU) in China are a particular example of successful partnership, and one which has been lauded by the Chinese government and awarded significant support from the Ministry of Education in Beijing.
- 3.2.6 While Government and Funding Council policy relating to research assessment has led to a concentration of public research funding into fewer, research-based university departments, a positive outcome in the RAE 2008 resulted in the College receiving QR funding. The College is using these funds to develop its research base in focused areas taking where appropriate, advantage of partnerships such as collaboration through Countryside and Community Research Institute with the University of Gloucestershire, the University of the West of England and Hartpury College. The College's mission places emphasis on third stream (knowledge exchange) activities, working with industry and employers to further develop its applied research and consultancy. It will continue to underpin such work with fundamental scholarship.
- 3.2.7 A main thrust of College strategy is to remain close to the industries and professions it serves, in its teaching, research and consultancy. This is consistent with the HEFCE policy on knowledge exchange. The College will continue to expand these knowledge exchange activities through the Business Development Centre (BDC), working with HE institutions and businesses in the South West.). The RAC 100 Club remains an important component of the College's links with the industries it serves.

3.3 Conclusions relating to the external environment

- 3.3.1 The College has a strong brand with an international reputation in agriculture, agricultural science, land and property management, equine management, and management of the food chain, with strong connections with the industries it serves. The College is well placed therefore to take on the challenges and responsibilities presented the increased need for leadership in agriculture, food supply and land use, arising from issues such as climate change and food security.
- 3.3.2 As a specialist college with expertise in vocational education, the College will continue to prioritise knowledge exchange activity, regionally, nationally and internationally. Applied and translational research and consultancy, training for continuing professional development (CPD) and regional business support will all be important areas of strategic development within its applied mission.
- 3.3.3 Policy changes in the EU and UK relating to sustainability in agriculture, food supply chains and management of the countryside, combined with the withdrawal of a number of university departments and colleges from support of the sector, continue to present significant opportunities for the College.
The significantly raised profile for agriculture, land use and a sustainable food supply both in the UK and internationally presents additional opportunities and responsibilities for the College. The role of a skilled workforce and the need for the translation of research and innovation in meeting the challenges that arise are well recognised, and the College will play a leadership role in meeting these societal needs.
- 3.3.4 A major component of College corporate strategy is the retention of its identity and independence, as a necessary part of its ability to meet the current challenges. It recognises that it will have to expand the size of its academic business in order to be sustainable and achieve these goals, and will seek and offer collaboration wherever that is appropriate.
- 3.3.5 This objective will be achieved through raising its international profile and increasing the number of international students; the development of foundation degrees; by the growth of funded student numbers; the development of fee-paying programmes; and by expanding its knowledge exchange, research and consultancy activities. Strategic collaborative partnerships with other universities and organisations, both nationally and internationally, are seen as essential for these developments, and are consistent with the steer given to the sector in the HEFCE Land-Based Review.

Section 4. Strategic Developments

4.1 Teaching and Learning

4.1.1 Aim

To provide innovative and challenging programmes delivered through differing means in a stimulating learning environment internally and externally to the

College, at foundation degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, that meet the needs of industry and across society, in the UK and overseas.

4.1.2 Objectives

- To promote and encourage innovation in the development of programmes within the mission of the College
- To emphasise the importance of quality assurance in all teaching and learning developments, and to prioritise quality enhancement
- To support the concept of lifelong learning, through lifelong learning networks and professional training activities
- To provide students with opportunities to engage with employers and professions through teaching and work experience
- To develop partnerships with other institutions regionally, nationally and internationally to benefit the learning experience of both students and staff
- To widen participation in College courses through pro-active recruitment of students from a diversity of backgrounds
- To maintain and develop the relevance of its courses to industry and society, and review critically all courses on a regular basis
- To broaden the range of learning opportunities through, for example, distance learning
- To work with employers in the provision of accredited learning appropriate for the industry

4.1.3 Key Performance Targets

- To continue to build on the award of 'confidence' in both quality of the learning opportunities and management of academic standards in the QAA Institutional Audit, achieved in 2007 through the implementation of the action plan, with particular emphasis on the management of collaborative provision.
- The number of publicly fully funded Home/EU students, having increased in 2010-11 from 2009-10, seem likely to remain static while public funding is constrained. The College will continue to seek to build numbers of overseas and other non-publicly funded students. The College will seek to recruit 135 such students in 2011/12 and over 200 in subsequent years; [the significant increase in overseas students in 2011/12 was the result of developing links with an overseas partner, and this is set to continue].
- The College will develop the provision of part-time and distance learning opportunities
- Continue to build recruitment on to the newer programmes, e.g. BSc in Food Production and Supply Management and MSc in International Real Estate.
- Widen participation in College programmes through, for example, continued collaborative arrangements with Cirencester and Wiltshire Colleges.
- Increasing postgraduate provision in the School of Real Estate and Land Management (RELM) through development of the MSc programme in Property Agency and Management.

- Continue to work towards its ReedNet co-funded number targets through the development of higher level, accredited training.

4.1.4 Key Strategic Risks

- That student recruitment processes fail to attract the forecast number of students
- That proposed cuts in HEFCE funding are not replaced by other income for teaching
- That appropriate strategic alliances in learning and teaching with other institutions either fail to be achieved, or fail in their objectives

4.1.5 Context

- The strategy in academic subjects over the next three years is to a) sustain the core undergraduate areas of agriculture, land management, property management, equine management, and business management, b) to develop a strong expertise in the food supply chain with a progression route from foundation degree through to masters level, c) to develop the portfolio of foundation degrees with appropriate Honours Year degree opportunities, d) to modularise the existing MBA degrees to enable them to be delivered part-time and by distance learning, e) to develop executive MBAs that can be delivered to companies and organisations in any part of the world, f) to establish the new MSc in Property Agency and Management, and g) to expand the existing MSc in International Rural Development.
- The College plans to increase in size from the student population from the current 1000 to 1200 over a four year period. The College will plan to recruit overseas students to approximately 15% of the student body.
- The College will widen participation in its programmes to students from different socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This will be achieved in part through its partnerships with FE Colleges at foundation degree level, with Honours Year agreements for completion of degrees at the RAC campus. In addition it continues to take positive action to recruit from inner city areas as part of its Access Agreement with OFFA.
- Currently there are College foundation degrees and Honours Years at Cirencester College and Wiltshire College. The RAC is part of the Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network and will develop its progression routes from foundation degrees to Honours Year opportunities through this network.
- International cooperation agreements are in operation with HE institutions in Asia, Africa, and North America. These involve collaborative postgraduate programmes, student exchanges and staff exchanges. These international alliances will be further extended. The current marketing campaign in China and India for students to study at RAC using agents will be extended to other countries during this period.
- These developments will be underpinned by a pro-active quality enhancement programme. This includes action plans related to the College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy which has four

themes - Academic Staff Development; Learning Teaching and Assessment; Evolution of Academic Provision; and Student Support Mechanisms (supported by the Change Academy project).

4.2 Research and Consultancy

4.2.1 Aim

- To continue to develop a research and consultancy capacity at strategic, applied and translational levels for the benefit of businesses and organisations nationally and internationally, and which supports the educational activities of the College

4.2.2 Objectives

- To provide a research ethos and culture within the College
- To encourage and enable staff to develop their research and consultancy abilities through staff development and mentoring activities
- To increase capability through appointment of staff who are research-active
- To generate new and applied knowledge to inform teaching and learning
- To increase research and consultancy output, of a quality that is recognised both nationally and internationally
- To sustain a balance between strategic research, and the translational research that is key to the applied mission of the College
- To increase the financial contribution of research and consultancy to the College
- To build on our understanding of business needs for research and consultancy in our sectors
- To work towards the achievement of research degree awarding powers over the next five years

4.2.3 Key Performance Targets

- To participate fully in the 2014 research excellence framework
- To increase the proportion of research-active staff to 35% by 2012
- To increase Number of articles in refereed journals, books, conference proceedings or magazines from a recent average of 1.0 per member of staff per year to 1.5 over the planning period
- Research and consultancy gross income to total >£300k in 2011/12 and beyond.
- To Increase the research student cohort throughout the period

4.2.4 Key Strategic Risks

- That new members of staff are appointed who are not research-active
- That appropriate professional development and mentoring support for members of staff is not able to be provided
- That the College fails to provide a research environment, ethos and culture
- That adequate funding for research, consultancy and research student scholarships is not secured

- That the College is unable to invest adequately to create a research infrastructure
- That the effect of full economic costing of research proposals, and other economic factors will reduce the availability of research funding

4.2.5 Context

- The College does not currently have a strong capability in basic and strategic research of a type eligible for traditional assessment exercises. However the applied mission of the College provides for a strong presence in applied research and development and in consultancy work through which to fulfil its knowledge exchange responsibilities and to develop translational research
- Only a minority of academic staff are research active due to their other commitments, reflected through appointment decisions made in the past. A priority for future academic appointments is for suitable candidates who are research-active.
- For present staff, Deans will use the appraisal and line management system to encourage and support research-active staff, measured through project-funding and / or academic publications. Staff will be encouraged to engage in consultancy and knowledge transfer activities in which the College has traditionally been strong.
- Pump-priming funding for research projects is available to staff, administered by the Research Committee from QR and other monies.

4.3 Knowledge Exchange

4.3.1 Aim

To exchange knowledge widely with peers, clients, decision makers and the general public, and in particular with businesses in the region, through professional development and business support activities

4.3.2 Objectives

- To encourage and support knowledge exchange activities by academic staff in the region, nationally and internationally
- To supplement the academic programmes with vocational skills training for students to aid employability
- To support rural, food and land-based businesses in the South West in collaboration with other HE institutions through facilitation of knowledge exchange and employer engagement activities
- To provide professional training programmes in the College for businesses and professions
- To provide vocational training in food, rural and heritage skills training for schools, groups and individuals
- To engage staff and students in networking opportunities with businesses and corporations in the agri-food sector through the RAC 100 Club
- To develop entrepreneurial skills and business experience in students through a Student Business Club

- To develop opportunities for the RAC through networking with organisations and businesses in appropriate sectors
- To participate in local education partnerships to promote skills development for the built and natural environment
- To develop a range of appropriate accredited qualifications relevant to the sectors served, where delivery is managed by the BDC, in collaboration with the Sector Skills Councils and industry bodies

4.3.3 Key Performance Targets

- Deliver a controllable margin of at least £82,500 year on year.
- Increase participation of academic staff in knowledge exchange activities to 40% of staff using 5% or more of their contracted time
- Deliver the outputs agreed in the HEIF4 contract
- Deliver the REEDNET employer engagement project, jointly with Harper-Adams University College, achieving the agreed outputs
- To achieve outputs for the Knowledge Escalator project, delivering the enterprise agenda in accordance with the contract with SWRDA
- Ensure that the Rural Skills Centre develops with sustainable funding, and provides programmes for a minimum of 1800 people in each year of the plan period.
- Secure continuation of the Rural Enterprise Gateway Knowledge Network and Groups projects for the duration of the plan period.
- Engage more than 30 new businesses per year in knowledge transfer activities
- Organise more than 24 professional training programmes per year.
- Further develop the Student Business Club concept, and involving at least 20 students.
- To secure £150,000 of new funding each year from external sources, to support activities managed by the Business Development Centre.
- Increase membership of the RAC 100 Club by 10% over the figure for August 2009, within two years

4.3.4 Key Strategic Risks

- That an economic downturn adversely effects commercial income
- That a change of government policy will reduce the availability of regional funds to support rural development
- That the BDC fails to deliver the required outputs of ongoing funded projects with consequential loss of future business
- That corporate professional training courses receive poor feedback with subsequent loss of business
- That a health and safety incident puts future vocational training programmes at risk
- That partnerships fail leading to a loss of impetus in collaborative projects.

4.3.5 Context

- An important strategy of government is to make better use of the knowledge arising from research and development in the public sector. This prioritisation of knowledge exchange forms the third leg of HEFCE

strategy, and support funding is provided to HEIs through HEIF for this purpose

- The College has an applied mission to provide leadership and support through its educational activities to businesses and professions in the rural economy and food chain, and its knowledge exchange activities therefore have a high priority. The Business Development Centre (BDC) is responsible for strategic development of this work and for its operational management
- Collaboration in knowledge exchange activities has developed strongly amongst HEIs in the South West in recent years, much of it with support from the SWRDA
- The Rural Skills Centre offers opportunities for expansion, not only in delivery of programmes to full-time RAC students, but also through links into the local community and developing contacts with the business community
- There is great potential for professional training to be expanded and this is an important area for academic staff engagement. In addition to bespoke programmes at the College, three nationally-recognised leadership courses and a number of major company courses are managed by the BDC
- The BDC also plays an important role in links with business through the RAC 100 Club which it administers, and provides support for the student Business Club

4.4 Commercial Businesses

4.4.1 Aim

To develop commercial activities through residencies and catering which promote the educational activities of the College, and which provide additional income for the College business and enhance the reputation of the institution

4.4.2 Objectives

- To maximise financial contribution
- To maintain a high level of service standard for accommodation, catering, bar, shop, coffee shop and gym.
- Improve and maintain market share by continued investment in facilities.
- To further develop cohesive service team
- To explore further opportunities for working with local suppliers
- To further develop working towards and eco-friendly environment.
- To collaborate with the Business Development Centre and Alumni Services in business development activities
- To work with the student liaison officer to continue to improve leisure facilities and support infrastructure.
- Continued growth and impact of the Cirencester Conference

4.4.3 Key Performance Targets

- Maintained occupancy levels of accommodation by students (campus and cottages) at over 98%

- Regular benchmarking exercises including participation in a graduate student barometer scheme. Focus groups and client feedback.
- Continued programme of training and development of staff
- Increased use of local suppliers and fair-trade goods where appropriate
- Achieve KPIs as set out in the Environmental Policy
- Increased levels of BDC and Alumni events
- Continued interaction with student union and wardens to further improve and expand leisure opportunities.
- Increased levels of attendance at the Cirencester Conference.
- Build on the current financial contribution to College of ca. £900k per year

4.4.4 Key Strategic Risks

Residences and Conferences

- That income will be lost through failure to recruit adequate students to fill the accommodation
- That lack of investment in upgrading of accommodation and catering will reduce demand and income
- That failure to recruit high quality staff will jeopardise business
- That the Italian schoolchildren (L'Astrolabio) contract for the summer will be lost
- That the current financial climate restricts external commercial business

4.4.5 Context

- Student residences have been full since 2004-05 and the continuing rise in student numbers is increasing demand for College accommodation. New build catered and self-catering accommodation came on line for 2008-09 academic year, and consideration is being given to sourcing off-campus accommodation. Further redevelopment of student accommodation is planned for 2011. Demand has exceeded availability to supply since 2005-06; however to maintain high occupancy levels a robust marketing plan will be crucial.
- The conference business makes use of College resources both in and out of term. It is a competitive business and activity has levelled out in recent years, with quality of accommodation continuing to be a limiting factor to expansion. The current financial climate will make the business environment increasingly competitive.
- The commercial activities of the College will develop in the context of the institutions environmental and sustainability policies and as part of the Estates Master Plan

4.5 College Farms

4.5.1 Aim

- To support the College's mission in teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer and exchange, and consultancy

- To provide an outdoor laboratory with a range of stimulating enterprises and environments
- To develop innovation and high quality management, and demonstrate by example
- To provide physical and financial records of activities in support of teaching and research
- To maximise profitability within the constraints of an institutional farm business
- To receive visits from those working in food chain and rural economy businesses and professions for knowledge exchange purposes
- To encourage visits from schools and the general public to improve communications relating to farming activities
- Consideration will be given to other commercial activities to generate income, benefit from government schemes on sustainable and renewable energy creation, and attract the public

4.5.2 Objectives

- To develop the farm at Harnhill Manor to support the learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange priorities of the College
- To build on the strategy, enacted in 2009 through the closure of the dairy and the establishment of partnerships with local dairy farmers, of improving the learning experience for students in this area.
- To build on the new contract farming arrangements put in place in 2009 to the benefit of learning and teaching.
- Development of the equine enterprise at Fossehill, broadening the range of activities beyond the facilities for polo ponies, established in 2007 at Fossehill
- To demonstrate profitable business management

4.5.3 Key Strategic Risks

- That capital investment is not available for the development of Harnhill Manor Farm
- That the new arrangements for the teaching of dairying do not deliver as anticipated.
- That farm prices decline putting further pressure on the farm's budget
- That farm costs increase putting further pressure on the farm's budget
- That financial projections for the new developments in the sheep and equine enterprises underestimate costs and/or overestimate income
- That enterprises are not managed well enough to deliver the budgeted financial returns to the business
- That a disease outbreak significantly reduces income and puts components of the enterprise at risk

4.5.4 Context

The Farms are the 'outdoor laboratory' of the College, but are managed commercially to provide case study information for students.

- Although the technical efficiency level of the Farms has been high, they have not been financially competitive. It remains a clear objective to

improve the profitability of the Farms while developing their value as an academic resource.

- A new strategy was developed for the Farms in 2009, with the focus on the core business of learning, teaching and research; the strategy will be cognisant of external policy factors including climate change and food security and how they will impact on land use and farm businesses.
- The strategy included the purchase in 2009 of 280 hectares at Harnhill Farm and the closure of the dairy herd at Elkstone. Contracts were let for the arable farming both at Coates (non-organic) and Harnhill (organic). Arrangements have been drawn up for access to two major local dairy enterprises to improve the learning opportunities in dairying.
- The College has withdrawn from the co-operative Cotswold Organic Lamb enterprise and retains a smaller flock at Harnhill.
- The Farms will become a 'knowledge centre' for agricultural and environmental uses of land for all stakeholders including the general public. Consideration will be given to setting up a 'Visitor Centre' for this purpose

4.6 Human Resources

4.6.1 Aim

To attract, develop and retain the best employees, treat them justly and equally, support and encourage them to achieve their maximum capabilities, and reward them fairly for their work

4.6.2 Objectives

- To ensure equality of opportunity in all matters of employment without discrimination due to age, race, gender, disability, religion or sexual orientation
- To have in place an effective mechanism for workforce planning that takes account of succession needs for key posts
- To deliver an effective programme of Recruitment and Selection training, in line with an updated R&S policy which takes into account current good practice.
- To support a planned CPD process for Staff and encourage participation in 'lifelong learning' activities
- To support the professional training of staff, including the achievement where appropriate of teaching and research qualifications
- To ensure that the terms, conditions and benefits of employment comply with legal requirements, promoting staff retention through the fulfilment of employee expectations of improved work / life balance
- To promote a culture where excellent contribution is recognised and rewarded through a fair and transparent with progression and promotion procedure

4.6.3 Key Performance Targets

- All staff involved in the R&S process will be trained in all relevant legislation, underpinned by good practice in equality and diversity

- Put in place a personal development plan for all members of staff detailing the CPD expected over the year, giving the reason for its inclusion in the plan and expected outcomes of the development activities undertaken
- Introduce policies relating to work-life balance, such as special leave and phased retirement
- Introduce a formal mechanism for succession planning and talent management of all staff by 2010-2011
- Establish guidelines for Managing Academic Workloads by 2010-2011
- Achieve 'Investors in People' status by 2010 - 2011

4.6.4 Key Strategic Risks

- That succession and recruitment planning fails to produce the outstanding candidates needed for key roles, with a resulting negative impact on the College business
- That expectations raised by planned staff development activities are not met due to lack of funds or time
- That an inflexible approach to working systems results in a reduced level of productivity, customer service or quality
- That staff dissatisfaction is created through the operation of a reward system that is perceived to be implemented using unfair, biased or unachievable criteria
- That employees refuse to take their personal responsibilities seriously in complying with equal opportunities legislation leaving the College vulnerable to legal action
- That current pension issues are not satisfactorily resolved

4.6.5 Context

- The College operates with a relatively stable workforce, and the main challenge is to ensure that the benefits arising from this stability are balanced by the attraction and retention of new staff who will bring the innovative skills and abilities to meet the evolving educational challenges of the future
- Succession planning will be required to ensure the continuation of leadership in the College as well as planning for the maintenance of the changing academic provision
- Previously planned academic staff increases, to provide a more favourable student: staff ratio, are unlikely to be achievable in the near future due to financial constraints.
- The learning and information strategy will also require staff to use different information delivery systems for teaching. 'Managed Learning Environments' will mean that teaching staff will have to be more technically able and capable of adjusting teaching methods to more on line delivery and assessment
- Management of staff training and development in line with the organisational and individual aspirations will continue to be an important planning and budgetary consideration. Clear career pathways and a positive reward culture will be used to ensure employee engagement at all levels

- The College has recently closed its own pension scheme for staff and put in place new structures; there remain some issues to be resolved that will require appropriate management.

4.7 Estates

4.7.1 Aim

To provide outstanding facilities to support teaching and research, to enhance the student experience and commercial aims of the College, and to manage the resources efficiently and effectively

4.7.2 Objectives

- To optimise the utilisation of existing teaching resources in a planned programme of improvements to meet the aims and aspirations of the academic strategy
- To optimise the utilisation of office, residential and operational accommodation in support of College aims.
- To optimize energy utilisation and efficiency in order to meet best industry practice and environmental standards, and meet new targets for the reduction in carbon usage in the sector.
- To maintain and augment the internal and external fabric of the College to enhance recruitment and provide a positive and memorable experience for staff, students, visitors and clients
- To provide a safe and secure campus for staff, students, customers and guests
- To provide a robust and first class IT service, network and infrastructure for teaching, research and support
- To invest in IT infrastructure and embrace new technologies to meet the demands and expectations of students, including the extension of wireless facility on campus and opportunities for remote learning and teaching
- To develop the estate to support the overall student experience, including the provision of further indoor sports facilities.

4.7.3 Key Performance Targets

- To continue to develop the Estates Master Plan and Environmental Policy
- To complete the HEFCE-funded capital spend on further upgrading and developing the Mechanisation Wing by early 2011, together with the completion of the new facilities and sports hall building and the biomass heating system.
- To begin the construction of a new student accommodation block in 2011 for completion in 2012.
- To continue to develop an energy-use policy which will lead to more sustainable systems of providing heat and electricity as part of a carbon-use reduction strategy
- To continue to seek joint venture arrangements with partners for the Corinium Campus site (previously known as 'The Triangle').

- To enhance the provision of IT to students and staff and sustain the provision of student PCs

4.7.4 Key Strategic Risks

- That the business plan for the College is not met, resulting in cut-backs in new build plans and infrastructure upgrading
- That a major structural problem arises with a College building requiring un-budgeted and uninsured cost of repairs
- That a major health and safety incident occurs which results in legal action and damage to the College brand and business
- That the College fails to develop its sustainability framework and policy and loses credibility and business as a consequence
- That the College fails to meet the targets set by the funding council for carbon usage reduction
- That under-investment in student accommodation and student facilities results in falling recruitment
- That the IT strategy fails to keep pace with developments elsewhere and as a consequence student recruitment is damaged

4.7.5 Context

- The College Estate has benefited from the receipt of capital input from HEFCE since entering the public sector. This combined with investment from the College business is enabling increased investment in the infrastructure, and the development of new buildings
- The Estate Master Plan will enable a longer-term more strategic approach in planning to be developed
- The Sustainability Framework outlined the new build requirements to provide facilities for the increasing number of students. Self-catering and catered student accommodation, additional sports facilities, additional IT facilities, and further upgrading of lecture rooms are the main priorities
- The climate change agenda will greatly influence strategy in the coming years. An institutional environmental strategy is currently being put in place which will result in the development of a more sustainable campus, and this should contribute to a more widely-based sustainable development strategy
- Whilst the perception might be that the College is in a good state of repair, there remains a significant backlog of maintenance and upgrading work to be carried out. Continual investment at or above current levels will be necessary for the foreseeable future
- Technological developments in IT are ongoing and sometimes rapid. Equally the expectations of students in the use of IT in teaching and learning are rising. An evolving strategic plan is needed which integrates e-learning needs in terms of staff development with the IT hardware and software needs such as the increased use of personal laptops and wireless facilities

4.8 Finance

4.8.1 Aim

To manage a profitable College business using effective financial processes which are rigorous and compliant with the College's financial regulations

4.8.2 Objectives

- To conduct operations in compliance with the terms and conditions of HEFCE's financial memorandum and accounts directive
- To maintain positive cash reserves and generate sufficient cash to allow the College both to maintain and develop the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the forecast increase in student numbers and build a contingency reserve
- To ensure that future national pay awards can be covered without compromising the targeted operating surplus
- To ensure adequate funding of the College defined benefit pension fund and the superseding arrangements
- To produce accounts and reports of high professional standard that deliver timely, accurate and meaningful information for budget holders, senior management, governors and shareholders
- To deliver a high quality payroll service to all College staff, both permanent and casual
- To ensure that the finance and payroll teams are adequately resourced and skilled to deliver a professional service to the College customer base, both internal (students, colleagues, staff) and external

4.8.3 Key Performance Targets

- To maintain a small operating surplus each year notwithstanding the current pressures on public sector funding and aim to achieve within 5 years a surplus equal to or greater than the 4.5% recommended by HEFCE for long term financial sustainability
- To maximise interest earned by pro-active treasury management that complies with good practice
- To comply with the HEFCE's annual accountability reporting requirements
- To comply with HMRC regulations for PAYE and VAT and to have systems in place to cope with XBRL reporting by April 2011
- To be in a position to move smoothly into preparing statutory accounts based on International Reporting Accounting Standards by 2013 with comparatives from August 2012
- To complete the upgrade and restructuring of the College financial accounting package and to keep processes under continual review to improve operating efficiencies by, inter alia, automating links between internal and external software systems
- To move to electronic document management and web based payments systems within 12 months
- To work with the Estates Department to introduce carbon accounting by 2011

4.8.4 Key Strategic Risks

- That student recruitment and retention targets are not met, resulting in reduced fee income and loss of HEFCE grant
- That CSR generated cuts in HEFCE grants cannot be made up by increases in tuition fees as outlined in the Browne Review
- That the expansion of competition for funded student numbers with contract numbers removed leads to significant volatility in student numbers
- That actions taken by the College to mitigate against the increases in the Pension Fund deficit and the legacy issued from the migration into TPS fail to deliver planned reductions in spend and require unsustainable financial contributions by the College
- That staff and/or non-staff costs are not kept under control by management
- That the Finance Department is not adequately resourced or sufficiently skilled to cope with the changing financial landscape
- That income generating departments (Conferences, Business Development and Farms) fail to deliver the budgeted margins
- That investment developments on the estate and farms fail to deliver the planned returns, both educational and financial

4.8.5 Context

- The College is generating operating surpluses and the business is on a sound financial footing as a result of tight cost control combined with a reversal of the decline in student numbers experienced during its latter years in the private sector
- The changing landscape post Browne and the CSR of 2010 presents the College with both opportunities for real growth yet threats as the “safety net” of public funding is significantly reduced
- The challenge the College faces is to handle the impact of downturn in the UK economy yet still grow, invest wisely in infrastructure and staffing and develop still further its educational portfolio and income generating activities
- It must do this against a background of costs (especially staffing) rising faster than income and, as a small HEI, having overheads proportionately greater than for larger institutions

Appendix 1 Core and Cross-cutting Themes within the Corporate Plan

