Name of Provider: Askham Bryan College

UKPRN: 10000415

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Name of Provider: Askham Bryan College

UKPRN: 10000415

Askham Bryan College

Askham Bryan College is a specialist land-based college located in the north of England, opened in 1948 as the Yorkshire Agricultural Institute. Askham Bryan College is an actively growing specialist provider and offers a portfolio of land-based higher education (HE) courses, spanning agriculture, animal (including zoo and companion animals) and equine sciences, horticulture, veterinary nursing and countryside disciplines. In addition, the College has also recently introduced foundation degrees in sport. Our vision is to be the College of choice for land-related learning.

The overall College Strategic Plan (2017-2020) aims to deliver on the following strategic aims:

1. Delivering an outstanding student experience through inspiring and excellent learning.
2. Delivering employability – giving our students life and work skills to make them successful in the future.
3. Delivering a great place to work – developing and supporting our staff to enable them to deliver for our students.

Our Higher Education Strategy, which is aligned to the overarching College Strategy, focusses on keeping students at the heart of what we do, and aims to deliver the following strategic priorities in relation to our higher education provision:

1. Deliver inspiring and outstanding learning, underpinned by scholarship and applied research.
2. Maximise our higher education student's educational achievements on graduation enabling them to add value to the communities they will live and work in.
3. Create a sustainable, collegiate and aspiring higher education environment.

Foundation degrees (FdSc) represent the majority of our higher education provision, with over 80% of students enrolled on FdSc programmes, with the remainder enrolled on BSc/BSc(Hons) programmes. In addition, we also offer a Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4) in Agriculture, with over 40 students currently enrolled on higher apprenticeships. We work in partnership with four validating universities: Harper Adams University (since 2004), the Royal Agricultural University (since 2013), Teesside University (2015-2018) and Leeds Trinity University (since 2017).

We have significantly increased student numbers over the past five years, with over 570 higher education students enrolled in 2017-18 (Figure 1).

The College estate extends through Yorkshire, Cumbria and the North East of England, with the York campus hosting the vast majority of higher education provision. Our specialist land-based facilities across these locations include five farms, working over 700 hectares of land in both upland and lowland settings, which enables students to experience different farming systems. The College's York-based farms include Westfield Farm and Home Farm. Newton Rigg College in Cumbria hosts Lowbeckside and Sewborwens Farms, which houses a state-of-the-art dairy in addition to the College's hill farm in Mungrisdale. Mungrisdale is a unique upland farming facility, being the only College hill farm in England, which offers major potential for additional teaching and research opportunities. The farms are an integral part of the College and serve both commercial and educational purposes. The Lance Gilling Centre, opened in October 2016, is now located at Westfield Farm (York campus) and is the hub for agri-technology at the College, with significant research potential in applied agricultural technology. This facility also houses the Rural Business

Research Unit (RBRU) and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) teams who operate out of the College. The Equestrian Centre, based at the York campus, has an indoor arena and an outdoor school, in addition to three indoor yards, stabling and support for up to 50 horses. There is also a cross country-training area and a point-to-point course. The Horticulture facilities include a broad range of areas including over an acre of glasshouse space, extensive outdoor spaces including polytunnel growing facilities, and extensive plant and tree collections, including a collection of over 350 tree species, a tropical display house, small golf-course, alpine rockery collection and a hard landscaping space with undercover area, specialist plant science facilities including a micropropagation laboratory, and a well-established arboretum. Recently developed Animal Management facilities include a 24 acre wildlife and conservation park alongside a new teaching centre, which includes a specialist veterinary nursing suite.

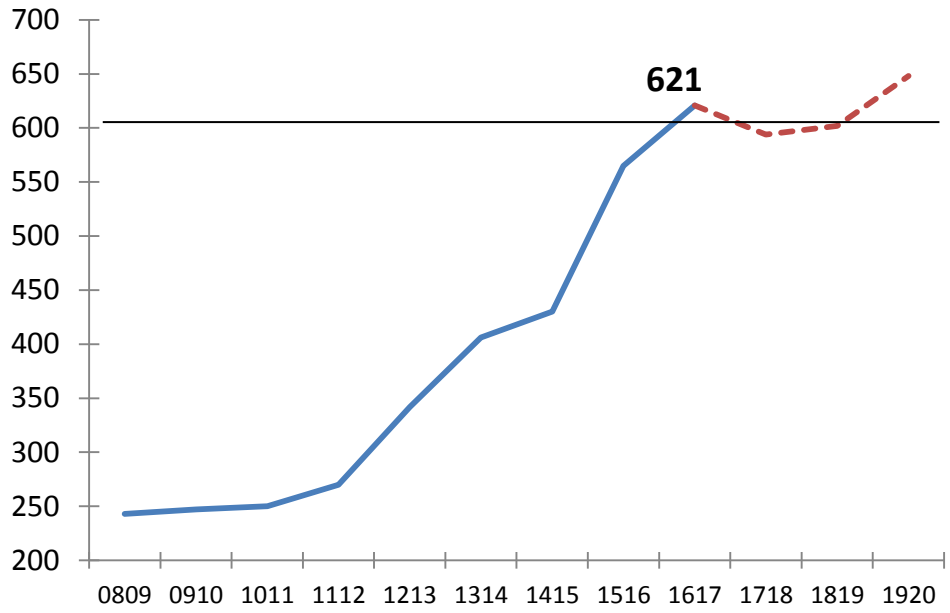

Figure 1. Total HE student numbers recruited by year 2008/09 to 2016/17, with estimated projections made 2017/18 to 2019/20. The projections are baseline figures, on the basis of no additional curriculum development and in line with demographic dips in population. The College predicts to enrol over 650 HE students by 2018/19.

Significant investment in our estate over the past three years has resulted in:

- a capital project of £10 million for new buildings and educational facilities for animal science and veterinary students including a state-of-the-art Wildlife and Conservation Park facility, a new veterinary suite, modern classroom facilities and an excellent practical resource for development of students' employability skills;

- a £4 million development on Westfield Farm comprising the new Lance Gilling Centre and training establishment, which includes teaching and workshop facilities, plus a large technology facility which has attracted further external support to boost resources; and
- laboratory refurbishments (£80k) to provide modernised laboratory facilities including a large animal dissection room.

As identified in the contextual data[1], 60% of our student postcodes are classified as POLAR[2] 1-3 (40% in POLAR categories 1-2), which is significantly higher than the UK average of students entering higher education from low participation areas (12% in 2015/16[i]). This represents a significant challenge for us as an institution in terms of supporting students originating from areas with low participation rates in higher education. As a College, we offer free transport from over 20 routes across the north of England, in an attempt to remove the financial and logistical challenges associated with travelling to College. In 2016-17, the investment by the College in transport for students was £788,681 and it is estimated that this will rise by approximately £50,000 in 2017-18.

Furthermore, we are considered a low-tariff provider (entry requirements are typically 48-84 UCAS points), which again presents some challenges to us in terms of student engagement, support and academic 'stretch and challenge'. However, we are committed to providing high quality educational opportunities to a wide variety of applicants, in particular supporting students from within the region to achieve higher education qualifications.

In addition, one fifth[1] of our students have a declared disability or learning support need. We are committed to removing barriers that may hinder students from accessing learning support whilst at Askham Bryan College. For example, we have committed to providing free access to learning needs assessments at the College, and to support the students' contribution to purchase of assistice technology (e.g. laptops) to ensure students do not have the financial burden which may discourage some students from pursuing learning support. In 2016-17, this contribution amounted to over £13,000.

2. Teaching Quality

Operating in a mixed economy (HE in FE) setting presents its challenges however we have made significant changes to how we manage and operate higher education at Askham Bryan College over the past five years to ensure that our successes in recruitment and curriculum development are effectively managed in the best interests of the students and staff.

The College has significantly improved its NSS scores for overall student satisfaction, with an overall satisfaction score of 82% achieved in 2016-17, an increase of 9% in the past two years (73% in 2014-15 and 79% in 2015-16). This comes alongside a significant growth in student numbers which has presented challenges to the organisation and management of higher education within the college.

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[1] TEF year 3 metrics for Askham Bryan College

[2] POLAR: Participation of Local Areas

2.2 Teaching informed by applied research

We are committed to supporting staff in their research ambitions, which can be a challenging for smaller higher education providers such as ourselves, however we recognise the enormous benefits gained via staff engagement (and student engagement, see Section 2.3) in current research and collaborating with external stakeholders. With the vast majority of research at the College currently funded internally, the College must maintain a balance between research ambitions and research outputs, however we have committed to supporting this ambition by providing internal funding (up to £10,000 per year) to which staff can bid to undertake research projects. This approach has resulted in an increase in active research activity at the College, with many projects involving students and external stakeholders as described in Table 1:

Stakeholder/ Collaborator	**Current collaborative research**
Morrisons Supermarkets/Woodhead Brothers; Yorkshire Farmers	A cost, impact and efficiency investigation into the effect of two different farrowing systems on sow and piglet welfare and production*
Animax Ltd.	An investigation into the effect of trace element supplementation in replacement ewe lambs*
British Alpaca Society; GWF Nutrition; Australian Alpaca Fibre Testing Ltd	An investigation into the feeding of Hembra during pregnancy on the fleece quality of the ensuing Cria offspring*
Aunt Bessies	Commercial parsnip production trial*
Newcastle University	Behaviour and welfare in diary cows: using facial grimace scoring as a measure of welfare* The use of thermography to non-invasively detect foot problems in cattle*
Rothamsted Research Institute	Biomass (willow) trial*
The Deep	Student projects
Stockbridge Technology Centre	Student projects
Flamingoland Zoo	Rhino enclosure design plus student projects
Harewood House Bird Garden	Student projects
Bishopton Veterinary Practice (RAFT)	Student projects
Trimble	Agri-technology development on farm

Table 1. Current collaborative research undertaken with external stakeholders 2016-2018; *****at least one student is collaborating with staff on this project

The Rural Business Research Unit (RBRU) at Askham Bryan College is a national consortium of six Universities and Colleges delivering projects for a range of clients by undertaking research in specific regional studies and national data collection. The College is home to one of the six Rural Business Research Units (RBRU) nationally whose work contributes to the Defra funded Farm Business Survey.The RBRU maintain a currency in the rapidly changing industry of farming and the agri-foods sector, which is of excellent benefit to our students. The RBRU also assist with knowledge transfer and advice on student dissertations.

2.3 Students as partners in research

Students work alongside staff in several research projects relating to some of the major challenges the land-based industries face such as food production, animal welfare issues and plant/animal health. Our staff actively involve students in vocationally relevant research, and have had made excellent progress in supporting and encouraging students to confidently promote and publicise their research (Table 2). This is especially important in growing the academic confidence of our students in preparation for the workplace.

In 2016-17 academic year, we introduced a 'research-café' style of supporting final year students in their research projects, which saw the integration of innovative team teaching and cross-college supervision/support of students research. This provided an opportunity for research active staff to attend a weekly morning session to supervise/support students with the research projects. This environment represents an informal forum for academic discussion with peers and staff members, the opportunity to get valuable academic support from a range of expertise and promotes open and public discussion of research ideas and progress.

Feedback from the students has been very positive:

> *"I have found the layout of the dissertation module very useful as it has removed the stress of trying to find my supervisor and ensures that I get feedback on my work every week which makes me feel more confident in achieving a high grade for my final report."*
>
> Final Year student BSc (Hons) Animal Conservation, January 2018.

Additonal scheduled workshops were held throughout the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years to engage students in aspects of the research process, which involved short seminars on a specific aspect of research (e.g. 'How to write an effective literature review'). These workshops were well-attended in the first year, but a reduction in attendance was noted in 2016-17. Coincidentally, this was also the year the 'research café' initiative began (above), which may have resulted in students being better prepared for research, thereby making redundant the need for additional workshops. We are confident that through this targeted approach, tailored to support our students, we have improved the student experience relating to research, increasing the personal and academic confidence of our students. This is an important example of how we support students at Askham Bryan College, particularly as the entry requirements to our undergraduate programmes are classed as low-tariff, therefore additional support is required to grow our students academic achievements and confidence.

Research (Student)	**Conference/Publication**
Enrichment effect on water activity levels and bumblefoot reduction in captive Humboldt penguins (*Spheniscus humboldti)* at Harewood House Bird Garden	(1) Published in Ratel*, September 2016 (2) presented at ABWAK** Conference, March 2017
The effect of substrate types on parasitic infection in ornamental pheasants housed at Harewood House Bird Garden	(1) Published in Ratel*, September 2016 (2) presented at ABWAK** Conference, March 2017
Length of time domestic dogs (*Canis familiaris*) spend smelling urine of gonadectomised and intact conspecifics.	Published in *Behavioural Processes*, 142 (138-140)
Causes of Stereotyping in an Amur leopard	Presented at BIAZA 18th Annual Research Symposium, 2017
Measuring animal welfare and applying scientific advances - why is it still so difficult?	Presented at UFAW*** International Symposium, June 2017
The importance of access to outdoor space for domestic cats (*Felis catus*) in rescue centres	Presented at British Veterinary Behaviour Association' (BVBA) Conference, April 2017
Can aromatherapy be used to reduce anxiety in hospitalised felines (*Felis catus*)	Submitted for publication to *The Veterinary Nurse*, Dec 2017
Do decibel levels post-operatively in kennels effect recovery time of canine patients after a general anaesthetic and ovariohysterectomy?	In preparation for publication- Veterinary Evidence
Can environmental and social enrichment techniques support geriatric dogs with cognitive dysfunction?	In preparation for publication- Veterinary Evidence
Do dog owners recognize behavioural indicators of Canine Cognitive Dysfunction and can environmental enrichment techniques slow its progression?	Submitted for publication to *The Veterinary Nurse*, Dec 2017
"Does the Feline Fort® (developed by Cats Protection) reduce stress in cat's inpatient at a Veterinary Surgery any better than a cardboard box or no hideaway at all?	In preparation for publication in 2018
Does use of the horsewalker increase equine salivary cortisol levels, a measure of stress in horses	In preparation for publication in 2018
The effect of sudden introduction of a novel object on equine heart rate, salivary cortisol levels and behaviour.	In preparation for publication in 2018

Table 2. Student research outputs achieved/in progress 2016-2018. All research undertaken in partnership with staff . ***RATEL:** Industry journal for Assocation of British and Irish Wild Animal Keepers; ****ABWAK:** Assocation of British and Irish Wild Animal Keepers, *****UFAW:** Universities Federation for Animal Welfare.

Students are regularly included within new and ongoing research projects as part of their wider learning at the College. For example, a research proposal was submitted to HEFCE's Catalyst Fund in October 2016 resulting in the successful award of over £16,000 (to be match-funded) to undertake an innovative project exploring student feedback on HE learning and teaching. Students have been closely involved in this project from its conception to data-collection. The project will see the development of a mobile app, whereby student can record their experiences in the classroom in real-time, allowing quick identification of good practice. The College is keen to undertake research not only in the specialist land-based subjects but also in wider learning and teaching related matters also.

Student engagement with external bodies is evidenced in the Colleges work with Flamingoland Zoo and Harewood House, offering students the opportunity to undertake research projects at these facilities. Students are encouraged and supported to formally present their research to an audience of academics and industry representatives. A further two students researching captive animal behaviour at Harewood House also had their research published in RATEL, the industry magazine for the captive animal management industry. We have taken advice from external examiners regarding exposing our students to more external platforms such as conferences. A positive outcome of this initiative is the extent to which students have become engaged in active research, supported by key academic staff. Students are encouraged and supported to identify projects of personal and professional interes. For example, the College's formal partnership with Flamingo Land Zoo offers a range of titles that are in the scope of interest of zoo stakeholders that they may engage with.

All students undertaking a final-year Dissertation present their research at an internal poster presentation event in May each year, attended by staff, governors and industry bodies. This has proved a very positive experience for students and represents the culmination of their time at the college and academic achievement.

2.4 Staff support

As an FE College, the College has a long history of undertaking observations of teaching and learning, and the introduction (2013-14 academic year) of a HE specific OTL process has seen better alignment of HE teaching at the College with HE specific criteria. This was designed to support our staff in achieveing excellence in their teaching practices.

During the 2016-17 academic year, to enhance this process, the College adopted a new Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) format for the developmental observation of HE lecturers. This process has been developed further for 2017-18, with clearer criteria based on the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and building on best practice as identified by the HEA. The pro-forma used for observations provides staff with a clear indication of their areas of strength and those where further development is required. As per College policy, HE OTL checks are normally undertaken once a year, and staff can further request further developmental observations.

From 2017-18, the College decided to introduce Internal Quality Reviews (IQR) to review the quality of teaching and learning in HE, using HE-focussed criteria which are clearly aligned to the UKPSF and the Quality Code (QC). From 2015/16, 'learning walks' have been used to provide a

snapshot of teaching and learning across the College, which are recorded using a real-time log on key themes observed across College. Learning walks are short observations and normally last up to 20 minutes. The purpose of teaching walks is to gain a broad understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and to support our staff in achieving excellence in their own teaching practice.

3. Learning Environment

A course manager is appointed to each HE programme and they are responsible for the management of the curriculum for that particular course, or suite of courses, including oversight of teaching, learning and assessment practices. Course managers are usually the first point of contact for pastoral and academc issues, and have access the support of a wider team of professionals within the Student Services team to assist where necessary, including the finance support officer, counselling and nurse services.

Allocated tutorial time is increased proportionally for larger cohorts to ensure they are effectively supported throughout their programme of study. Course managers follow an agreed tutorial scheme of work for group sessions, which covers a range of topics and activities to support student performance, progression and achievement. This tutorial schedule is reviewed annually by course managers and students at the HE Team meetings, and may include changes based on good practice and/or student feedback.

3.1 Continuation

Continuation data for the College indicates that performance has historically been below benchmark. This is something that we have been aware of over the past three years, and the following support measures/interventions were instigated in response to poor retention rates on some programmes, notably the Extended Foundation Degree programmes and some Foundation Degree programmes.

Recent interventions and support measures to improve student retention **are described below:**

3.1.1 Amendment of entry requirements onto Level 4 programmes

Prior to 2015/16, the entry requirements for entry onto Foundation Degree programmes at the College did not include any requirement in relation to science-related knowledge or qualifications. This was recognised as being a potentially limiting factor in student retention on Foundation degree programmes at the College, as a significant amount of the content of all degree programmes is science-related, requiring a basic underpinning scientific understanding prior to entry. The entry requirements were updated for 2015/16 recruitment to include a minimum of a Science GCSE at Grade C.

3.1.2 Improved recruitment and initial advice and guidance (IAG) for applications onto the Extended Foundation Degree

From 2016 onwards, applicants to the Extended Foundation Degree programmes were more rigorously assessed for academic ability and suitability prior to offering places on these programmes. Previously, the entry criteria onto these programmes could have been defined more clearly. This led to the recruitment of some students who may not have been adequately prepared

for higher education. This consequently led to poorer retention on some of these programmes, impacting on overall College retention and continuation rates. The decision was made prior to commencement of recruitment activities for the 2016/17 academic year to revise and impose a more rigorous selection process for entry onto the Extended Foundation Degree programmes. Noticeably, the College has seen a significant increase in in-year retention on the Extended Foundation Degree programme in 2015/16, increasing from 29% retention in 2014/15, to 92% retention in 2015/16.

The Extended Foundation Degree programmes historically returned low retention figures and the interventions put in place to improve retention on this programme is unlikely to be measurable until 2016/17 onwards.

3.1.3 Increased allocation of tutorial time to strengthen student support mechanisms

The College is continually monitoring support arrangements for students regarding tutorial structure and delivery. We have introduced increased tutorial time for all students by 100% on higher education programmes, this is a mix of group and individual tutorial time. Additionally, allocated tutorial time is increased proportionally for larger cohorts to ensure they are effectively supported throughout their programme of study. Course managers follow an agreed tutorial scheme of work for group sessions, which covers a range of topics and activities to support student performance, progression and achievement. Within tutorials, course managers of all programmes have focussed on ‘bridging’ sessions at the beginning of Year 1 studies to assist students in making the transition onto degree level study. The focus of these bridging sessions are on enhancement of higher level academic/study skills such as analysis and evaluation of information; research skills; interpretation skills and academic writing techniques. Year 2 bridging sessions are also included at the beginning of the academic year to support students with transition between levels of study.

3.1.4 ‘Raising Aspiration’ activities

To raise aspiration and to further support academic achievement, additional measures were implemented to promote student engagement/involvement in academic activities including:

- Student attendance/presentation of research work at conferences
- Series of lunchtime seminars to support different aspects of learning in relation to academic skills development e.g. ‘How to research literature’ and ‘Writing scientific reports’
- Dissertation preparation day for students progressing to Level 6 study
- Further promotion of the Annual Research Poster Presentation day which includes invited employers and industry representatives

In addition to the interventions implemented as described above, the College is committed to ongoing investment in staff training in relation to the student journey. Staff training weeks occur at least three times a year and current examples of staff training to support student success, and their ongoing academic and personal development have included:

- Enhancing feedback: feed-forward for feedback
- Adopation of marking matrices to provide effective feedback

- Standardisation of feedback mechanisms through online marking
- Behaviour management
- Learning Support: autism, mental health and support training

The interventions described in this letter were clear actions taken by the College to improve overall retention and continuation from 2016. We accept that the interventions implemented to improve retention cannot be fully measured at this point in time, however we have taken quick and targeted action to improve the student experience and success of our students.

Furthermore, early 2016/17 data suggests high in-year retention figures, as generated by the College's internal reporting systems.

3.2 Students as partners

The College aims to provide a supportive, inclusive and accessible learning environment for its students. We aim to academic, scholarly, social value and employability to its higher education students and to place students at the heart of the College's activity.

The vocational programmes offered at the College provide excellent opportunities for development of employability and self-development skills. The College aims to include students as equal partners and has made significant progress in accessing the student voice over the past two years.

Student engagement via membership of the Academic Board and its subcommittees has further reinforced the partnership between staff and students in making decisions relating to teaching and learning matters. Students are encouraged to present formal papers to the Academic Board and its sub-committees, and are supported by the Chairs to achieve this. This experience has grown students' confidence in operating in a formal organised setting. Students were also consulted at a very early stage in our preparation for applying for our own Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) and have attended regular information and briefing events over the past two years in relation to this.

3.3 Student Union Statement

The Student Union opted to write a statement in support of this submission, which emphasies their experience and how they value their roles in decision making and wider aspects of College life:

"As the Student Union, we believe that the students have a say regarding what goes on at the college, as the president and vice-president are invited as members to meetings with the academic board and associated committee meetings to give a voice to the students. As a result of the student wishes taken higher up, the library hours have been extended, free transport to college has been established, along with social spaces for the HE being renovated and improved.

The HE students also like the way in which certain lessons have been conducted this year. For instance, the research/dissertation modules have changed to become a café style, which allows better peer work and more interaction with supervisors. Along with the changes to the style of lessons, the high number of contact hours with the lecturers and course managers, via tutorials,

allows students to access better understanding on certain subjects whilst developing individual time management skills.

Since the College opened the Wildlife Park, there have been more practical experience opportunities for students, both in lessons and as work experience hours. This increase in opportunities will allow students to develop their own vocational skills, which will make them more attractive as employees upon graduation."

Askham Bryan College Student Union, January 2018.

3.4 Student Learning Environment

The College continues to consider innovative ways to support its students and their wider needs as part of the on-going capital investment plans. Additional study space for HE students has been created in the Learning Resources Centre (LRC), where there is now a dedicated HE-only study area. However, the significant growth in HE at the College over the past three years has challenged the College's vision to support resource developments and has refocused discussions in relation to study and social space needs of HE students. In response to further student feedback, the College made a more accessible study space available for students in the Main Building in September 2016, which is more visually appealing to students and offers a closer space to allow effective study and group work to take place. To maximise usage of this space, this area also doubles up as a social space for residential HE students in the evenings.

In addition, significant refurbishment of existing space in Autumn 2017 resulted in a separate, aspirational space for HE students to function as study, social and support space. The LRC at York has further extended its opening hours, working with students to identify the most appropriate extensions to the existing opening hours to maximise impact.

Since 2014, the College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE-Moodle) has seen a number of changes, the most recent of which is an update to the current version of Moodle and re-design of the student-facing interface. Anecdotal feedback indicated that students were pleased with the new format which has a more intuitive interface and enabled easier navigation. This ensures that effective learning opportunities are provided for students who require remote access or may be studying at a distance. There has been further investment in improved IT infrastructure to ensure that student access to the intranet, on and off campus, is more reliable and to improve the functionality of the system.

The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) now purchases the majority of key texts as e-books and has extended the range of electronic journals, which students can access from all College sites, and through access to the internet. The College designated an additional £30,000 for academic journal subscriptions in 2017/18 budget, which indicates our commitment to supporting our students especially in light of development of new programmes and student growth.

4. Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

4.1 Employability

Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) are used in each curriculum area to engage with industry on curriculum matters, industry updates and requirements and to strengthen employer links in terms of work placements. There are currently over 200 employers working with the College to provide placement opportunities to HE students.

The most recent Higher Education Review (HER) found that '*the College's strong links with employers promotes security in the development and design of new programmes and the development of vocationally relevant learning outcomes'* (HER, 2014). Due to the nature of most of the programmes, placement learning is embedded into the majority of higher education programmes thereby allowing students to gain valuable vocational skills before they enter the workplace. Maintaining links with employers via the TAG network is an excellent way to mutually promote placement and employment opportunities to students.

Subject area	Number of employers
Adventure & Outdoor	12
Agriculture (Including Countryside)	40
Animal Management	74
Equine	40
Horticulture	11
Veterinary Nursing	55
TOTAL	**232**

Table 3. Breakdown of numbers of employers linked to HE programmes during 2016/17 academic year.

The College has an established relationship with the research component of a large locally-based veterinary research group, which has practices all over the UK and Ireland. Students from the Agriculture section have opted to undertake final year research projects in conjunction with this research group which has involved visits to their facilities to discuss projects with industry representatives. Similarly, the Food and Environment Research Agency is located a short distance from the York campus and visits made there by Horticulture and Arboriculture student groups to explore current research themes. Staff members from both RAFT and FERA have now also been accepted as Fellows of the College. A further two members of staff from Stockbridge Technology Centre (STC) are being proposed as Fellows at the next Academic Development Committee (Spring 2018), as we wish to continue growing these excellent external stakeholder links.

4.2 Enhancement of student opportunities

The vast majority of programmes offered at Askham Bryan College have a work placement requirement. However, we also offer excellent opportunities in-house for our students to develop

vocational and practical skills to better prepare them for the working environment. For example, our state-of-the-art wildlife park offers students the opportunity to work in a real zoo setting, not only developing skills in the practical management of animal collections, but also getting involved in visitor and attraction management- a crucial aspect of the zoo industry. Similarly, students undertake work on our farms, which offers a range of farming enterprises to gain experience of prior to going into industry. Close working relationships between academic and technical/support staff at the College ensures effective communication and management of student opportunities. This view is collectively shared by students, as suggested in Section 3.3 in the Student Union statement.

4.3 Highly-skilled employment

Our metrics for highly skilled employment of our students falls below benchmark, however it should be noted that we operate in a specialist sector, which offers different graduate outcomes for students of land-based disciplines.

The land-based sector is predominantly comprised of micro-businesses, with 95% of businesses in the sector employing less than 10 staff (85% employing fewer than 5 staff)[ii]. Although small and micro-business may value and indeed require graduate skills and attributes in their employees, these businesses are unlikely to offer prestigious titles and salaries. The occupational breakdown of the land-based sector is significantly different compared to broader industries, with 48%[ii] employed in skilled trades, which includes farmers, stockperson/groundsperson roles. A further 17%[ii] are employed as labourers. As such, the land-based industries we serve may not offer the same managerial and professional opportunities compared to other industries. This may be a barrier for our graduates to enter the 'highly skilled workplace', which are mainly defined as managerial and professional, as defined by the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) groups 1-3.

In 2014, the overall average salary for people working on farms was close to the national average, however over 30% were earning between £20-£30,000[iii]. The report also found that farm workers' salaries and hourly-paid rates were lower in the north of England compared to other areas of the country. Although there is a relatively low level of unemployment in the area (around 3.5%)[iv], the main growth in job opportunities between 2014-2016 was in lower paid sectors. This mirrors with our own graduate employment profile- excellent destinations data (DLHE statistics) but low numbers in highly skilled employment.

As our data maps[3] indicate, the majority of our students find employment locally or within the region, which may also have an impact on salaries/wages available to graduates staying in the region. In comparison to the sector wide map[3], the proportion of graduates in highly skilled jobs in York and North Yorkshire regions is low compared to other areas. This is likely to be a reflection on the industries our graduates gain employment in, combined with regional location.

Additionally, the majority of our students are enrolled on Foundation Degree programmes (Level 5). Whilst we recognise that leaving with a level 5 qualification may provide future opportunities for

[3] Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): TEF Year Three Data Maps. Askham Bryan College 1000415

entry to graduate level professional roles, it is unlikely that a Level 5 qualification will lead to immediate employment in a professional role. Therefore, we feel that recognition of our excellent indicator for employment or further study (100%)[1], should be considered in light of the rationale provided above regarding the industries our students are entering, in particular the local and regional economies. Our graduate outcomes relating to employment clearly aligns with our strategic aims (page 2) which aims to *"maximise our higher education student's educational achievements on graduation enabling them to add value to the communities they will live and work in".*

5. Conclusion

As a successful specialist provider of land-based vocationally-focussed degrees, we are confident that we deserve at least a Silver TEF award, which would reflect the nuances of delivering high quality teaching and learning in a specialist sector, with a strong regional recruitment and graduate employment profile. We have implemented interventions to improve some our data around retention and continuation, in addition to facilitating a suite of support systems to help our students achieve higher education qualifications. As our student numbers have grown over the past few years, we have listened to, and worked closely with, the student body to improve their experience at the College, which we believe will support our stduents to continue and achieve their qualifications. We continue to support our graduates to gain relevant employment in the industries we serve, maintaining excellent links with employers and contributing to the local economic development by provising skilled graduates for the land-based sector.

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[i] **HESA.** 2017. *Widening participation summary: UK Performance Indicators 2015/16. Table B - Percentage of UK domiciled young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) by location of HE provider and academic year* [online]. Available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/widening-participation-summary.

[ii] **LANTRA.** 2014. *The UK Land-Based and Environmental Sector: Skills Assessment Update Spring 2014* [online]. Available at: https://www.lantra.co.uk/sites/default/files/The-UK-Land-based-and-Environmental-Sector_-Skills-Assessment-Update-Spring-2014_0.pdf

[iii] **Farmers Weekly.** 2014. *Pay survey: Who gets what in the farm industry* [online]. Available at: http://www.fwi.co.uk/business/pay-survey-who-gets-what-in-the-farm-industry.htm.

[iv] **Department for Education.** 2017. *York, North Yorkshire, East Riding and Hull Area Review. Final Report* [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634682/York_North_Yorkshire_East_Riding_and_Hull_Area_Review_Report_FINAL.pdf