

HEFCE 01/65

Respond by 25 January 2002

November

Invitation

Higher Education Active Community Fund

Guidance and allocations

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To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions
Of interest to those responsible for	Links with business and the community, Widening participation strategies
Reference	01/65
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document provides guidance and allocation details for the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), intended to enhance the key role played by higher education institutions (HEIs) in the local community. It is part of the Government's wider Active Community initiative which aims to involve more people in voluntary activity in their local communities. The initiative follows on from the objectives of the Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund (HEROBC), and proposals in the paper 'Urban Renaissance' from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Key points

2. Volunteering will help both staff and students gain new perspectives and enable them to develop their employment skills while enhancing the quality of life in disadvantaged sections of the community.

3. Up to £27 million will be allocated under the HEACF to English HEIs, subject to their submission of plans and targets for using the funds. HEIs have until the end of August 2004 to produce the required outcomes.

4. The funding will enable the creation of almost 14,000 new opportunities for volunteering by the end of the academic year 2003-04, cumulatively across the whole sector. It will allow staff, as well as students, to significantly increase their involvement in the community.

5. This document gives guidelines on the content of plans, and the allocations for each institution (Annex A).

Action required

6. Please send plans to Jessica Lincoln at the HEFCE to arrive by **25 January 2002**. Earlier submissions would be welcome.

Background

7. The Government's Active Community Fund, which includes the HEACF, is part of a package of measures designed to encourage greater involvement in voluntary and community activities. Volunteering helps to promote a fairer, more cohesive society in which individuals feel they have a stake. It also helps to build bridges between communities and local organisations such as HEIs. The aim is that 1 million more people will become involved in their communities, on top of the 12 million who already undertake some sort of regular voluntary work. £300 million is being spent to support volunteering and make substantial progress towards this target.

8. The HEROBC remit includes higher education activities that reach out to the wider community. The HEACF initiative, in which the HEFCE is a partner alongside the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Home Office, is intended to raise the profile of this aspect of the programme. It will complement existing HEROBC projects and should not be seen as competing with paid student work placements. Nor should volunteering be undertaken at the expense of a paid work placement where the latter is the better option for an individual student. Rather, volunteering is an additional option which complements paid work placement activity for staff, students and the HEI. The HEACF initiative is also intended to complement existing outreach activity which institutions undertake as part of their widening participation strategy.

9. We consulted the sector on proposals for the HEACF in June (HEFCE 01/42). These guidelines reflect responses to the consultation, which are summarised in Annex B.

Strategic aims

10. The HEACF scheme will focus on developing links between HEI staff and students and the wider community, building on the institutions as significant participants in the local economy and making people more aware of the wide range of resources they offer. Volunteers (staff and students) from any academic discipline will be supported, with an emphasis on working in partnership with not-for-profit organisations and in disadvantaged areas.

11. Volunteering by staff and students is a strong feature in many universities and colleges. Increasing the involvement of HEIs with their communities should help staff and students to gain new perspectives, enable students to develop employment skills, and help to enhance the quality of life in disadvantaged sections of the community.

12. Funded activities should lead to recognisable benefits for the volunteer as well as for the community, including the development of generic skills (although not necessarily linked directly to course curriculum), and hence improved employability. Over the sector as a whole, the spectrum of participating volunteers should reflect the diversity within higher education in England, and should include mature students, particularly those over 50 years of age. These activities should also contribute to the fulfilment of the HEI's mission, and be consistent with both its widening participation strategy (see HEFCE 01/29 'Widening

participation in higher education: funding decisions for 2001-02 to 2003-04'), and its learning and teaching strategy (see HEFCE 99/48 'Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund') as appropriate.

Funding and targets

13. Up to £27 million will be allocated under the HEACF, using a formula based on the numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and students – including those funded by the Teacher Training Agency and the NHS. Awards will be subject to a minimum and a maximum. A fuller description of the formula and details of the allocations are given in Annex A.

14. The HEFCE and the Home Office are each contributing £13.5 million for the initiative over three years from April 2001, as an aggregate of £6.5 million for each of the first two years and £14 million in the final year.

15. In return for their funding allocation, we will ask HEIs to submit plans for using HEACF funds. Funding will begin in early 2002 and will continue until August 2004, subject to satisfactory provision of concise plans and targets, and continuing delivery of agreed outcomes.

16. It is expected that the number of volunteering opportunities developed by each HEI will be related to the funding allocated (see also paragraphs 18a and 18b) with almost 14,000 new volunteering opportunities by the end of August 2004. However, the achievement of this target, or institutional sub-targets, is not sufficient in itself: we will also consider the quality of the submissions. Quality will need to be validated by the community partners (the organisations that make use of the volunteers) during the life of the awards.

Guidelines for funding plans

Main elements

17. For the funding to be released, HEIs should provide up to 6 pages of A4 showing how HEACF funding will be used to:

- generate new opportunities for volunteering and community involvement
- complement any of their activities funded by HEROBC and/or the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)
- complement any of the activities outlined in their learning and teaching strategy action plans and widening participation strategy action plans
- develop links with existing national and regional volunteering organisations such as Community Service Volunteers and Student Volunteering UK.

18. HEIs should build on any significant links with existing voluntary sector and not-for-profit organisations that engage with staff and students in higher education. Plans should

show not only what will be done but also how this will contribute to creating new volunteering opportunities. Plans should also specify for each year:

- a. The target number and type of volunteer opportunities, demonstrating that the target is proportional to the amount of funding allocated within the overall fund.
 - b. The Government is particularly keen to encourage volunteering among the over-50s. Plans should respond to this, taking account of the proportion of students over 50 studying at the institution.
 - c. The benefits for the HEI that would not have been realised without this funding, for example supporting its overall mission to work with the wider community.
19. Plans should demonstrate what links are to be made with community organisations, and how. The sorts of activities available to volunteers should be defined in a reasonably standard format. An opportunity need not simply be for one person to undertake one piece of work: institutions may demonstrate both the potential and the intention within the HEI and the community organisation for a succession of staff or students to fill the position.

Benefits for students

20. Plans should describe how HEIs will promote volunteering and encourage students – including those who are less well off – to participate, for example by showing how volunteering can improve their employability and develop their generic skills.
21. Benefits to students must not include pay or benefits in kind, such as reduced accommodation costs, nor distort other mechanisms such as hardship funds. However, it might be appropriate to reimburse students for identifiable expenses.

Incentives for staff

22. Plans should detail incentives for staff. These could encourage staff to devote time to developing volunteering, or enable them to become directly involved with community activity by freeing them from other duties, as a positive contribution to their career development.

Validation

23. Student volunteers should be involved in the validation of their activity and feedback from the community organisations should be built in. This should be related to both the HEI's overall scheme and the volunteer where necessary, to give accreditation evidence for the student's personal record. The costs incurred in generating volunteering activity, in supporting volunteers and in maintaining the opportunity when volunteers are not active are all potentially acceptable costs under the HEACF.

Collaboration

24. Collaboration between HEIs is not essential but is welcome. Smaller HEIs in particular may wish to collaborate with their larger neighbours in order to minimise costs. Collaborative plans should show that there is added value for the volunteers, the HEIs and the community organisations.

25. If HEIs have existing links and activities with volunteering organisations, these should be built in to their plans and built on to add value.

Examples of fundable activity

26. Examples of activity which could be supported through the HEACF include:

- mapping current staff and student involvement in the community, and developing ways to recognise skills acquired by the students
- appointing co-ordinators, and developing the organisational infrastructure to promote the institution's position within the wider community and with partner further education colleges
- disseminating good practice, and co-ordinating institution-wide systems to increase the impact of volunteer work
- students taking part as volunteers in cultural and sporting events and environmental projects
- releasing staff to generate new contacts between the institution and the community, and related opportunities for volunteering
- students working as volunteers in schools, prisons, hospitals or local community organisations and groups
- staff and students coaching young people in sport and drama
- opening up arts, library, museum and sports facilities to the community, especially through new technology.

27. Some HEIs may want to focus some or all of their activities on contributing to widening participation. This might, for example, involve using student and staff volunteers as mentors or in other capacities working with schools and further education colleges, complementing existing widening participation outreach activities – including those funded under the Government's Excellence Challenge programme where applicable.

28. Involvement of the private sector may be appropriate where the HEI and company work together to provide volunteers to the not-for-profit organisations, and where this supports the HEACF objectives.

29. National and regional networking of HEI staff involved in any aspect of the HEACF activity should be considered and incorporated in the plans.

Suitability of volunteers

30. As part of each HEI's responsibility for ensuring a good match between volunteers and opportunities, particular consideration should be given to screening and good practice where contact with vulnerable individuals may be involved.

Student volunteer awards

31. It is proposed to run a national scheme of annual awards for students who have shown significant commitment to activities funded by the HEACF. Although the scheme has yet to be finalised, it is likely that any award process will take account of nominations from HEIs and the community organisations, and will be assessed independently.

Monitoring

32. Monitoring will be through the annual operating statements that institutions already submit to us. It will focus on quality control, the achievement of targets, benefits to all parties, and accreditation for the volunteer.

33. In requesting information about volunteers we will take account of HEIs' need to comply with the Data Protection Act. We also propose to invite HEIs to submit examples of successful projects in progress, to disseminate good practice to other institutions and the operating partners, and to provide initial evidence for the student volunteer award scheme.

Submission of plans

34. Plans should be a maximum of six A4 pages, with a minimum font size of 10 point and no additional annexes. Please submit two paper copies, one bound, one unbound, plus an electronic version in Microsoft Word by e-mail. The e-mail document will be the master version. These should be sent to the following, to arrive **by 25 January 2002**. However, earlier submissions would be welcome.

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Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
BRISTOL
BS16 1QD

e-mail j.lincoln@hefce.ac.uk

Structure of proposals

35. Please structure your proposal to include the following information:

- contact for further correspondence including name, position, address, phone and e-mail address
- scale and scope of volunteering activities to be undertaken, with particular reference to how they meet the criteria in paragraphs 17-20 and 23 of this document
- partners in the programme
- number of opportunities to be created, as described in paragraph 18
- outline budget and costings
- total funding expected from other sources (if applicable)
- other supporting information.

