

## **Annex B**

### **HE Active Community Fund: summary of consultation responses**

#### **Support for the initiative**

1. There were 85 formal responses to the consultation process. Of these 72 were from higher education institutions (HEIs) and 13 from other interested bodies. All respondents broadly supported the scheme and welcomed it as diversifying the impact of activities to improve links between HE and the community. Many HEIs commented that activities outlined in the consultation document were already part of their institutional mission and have been actively pursued for some time.

2. Allocation of funds by formula was also welcomed, but views differed on the approach and level of complexity. Many respondents also regretted the limited time-scale of the HEACF process, not only because of the time needed to formulate plans, but also the quick turnaround between consultation and allocation. It was noted that the beginning of the academic year would have been the best time to raise awareness of the benefits of voluntary work.

#### **Strategic aims**

3. Many respondents commented that the drive to fulfil the proposed target (up to 14,000 volunteering opportunities) should not eclipse the need for infrastructure development and promotion of existing activity. Linked to this is the concern that monitoring the quantity of 'new opportunities' should not outweigh the quality of the impact within the community. Respondents stressed that volunteering is a 'two-way street', in that the benefits must be obvious to all parties for the activity to be a success.

4. Developing the idea of the safety net, many (smaller) HEIs supported a flat rate allocation for infrastructure. This would fit with another of the most common responses – the need for collaborative action. The majority of the sector wished to avoid reinventing the wheel and unnecessary competition for volunteer opportunities within the community.

5. Some respondents also noted that the proposed formula was overly simplistic. Some suggested including the institution's track record in volunteering as a criterion; others expressed a preference to include postcodes so as to direct more funding to the less advantaged areas of the country.

6. There was a variety of responses concerning the use of FTE student figures as the primary basis for allocation. It was stressed that not to include students funded by the NHS or the Teacher Training Agency would be unfair on the students themselves and on those HEIs where they make up a significant part of the student body.

## **Incentives and barriers**

7. Payment of incurred expenses is widely accepted. However, some wanted to pay volunteers, given that the primary obstacle to voluntary work is that more than half of students today engage in part-time work to fund their study. Related responses suggest giving volunteers priority when allocating hardship funds, or giving academic credit for voluntary work to ease time constraints.
8. Mature students are seen as being more likely to have had strong previous links with the community. However, respondents felt that this group in particular would suffer from time constraints.
9. Altruism is still held as a primary motivating factor for volunteering, but employability is increasingly important. This is seen as a particular difficulty for those already involved in part-time work, as they are more likely to be from a disadvantaged background and therefore more likely to benefit from the social inclusion that voluntary work can promote. The constraint of paid employment was the most often mentioned barrier to a broad uptake of voluntary work.
10. Since there are many factors affecting the potential involvement of different groups of students, the need for diversity and flexibility within the scheme was seen as paramount.

## **Reporting and dissemination**

11. Most HEIs felt that some method of disseminating good practice was vital to the success of the programme. However its exact form was open to debate. The majority thought that dissemination should be through the existing organisations that are focused on student volunteering – locally, regionally or nationally or a combination of them.
12. In general the light-touch approach was welcomed, with reporting to the HEFCE via institutions' annual operating statements.
13. There were a number of references to the need for an organised network for those involved in managing student volunteering. Some suggested an electronic discussion board, while others proposed conference meetings throughout the process. Community Service Volunteers (CSV) already maintains a database of student voluntary activity.

## **Award scheme**

14. Most HEIs supported the idea of an award scheme, though its shape was the subject of much contention. Some advocated academic accreditation to allow students to feel that they have time and are directly benefiting from the experience; others recommended institutional or national certificates or awards. Another proposal was to have links with the upcoming Progress Files scheme (operated by the DfES and the Quality Assurance Agency

for Higher Education), which would record achievements leading to enhanced employability. However there was little support for high profile awards to a few selected volunteers.