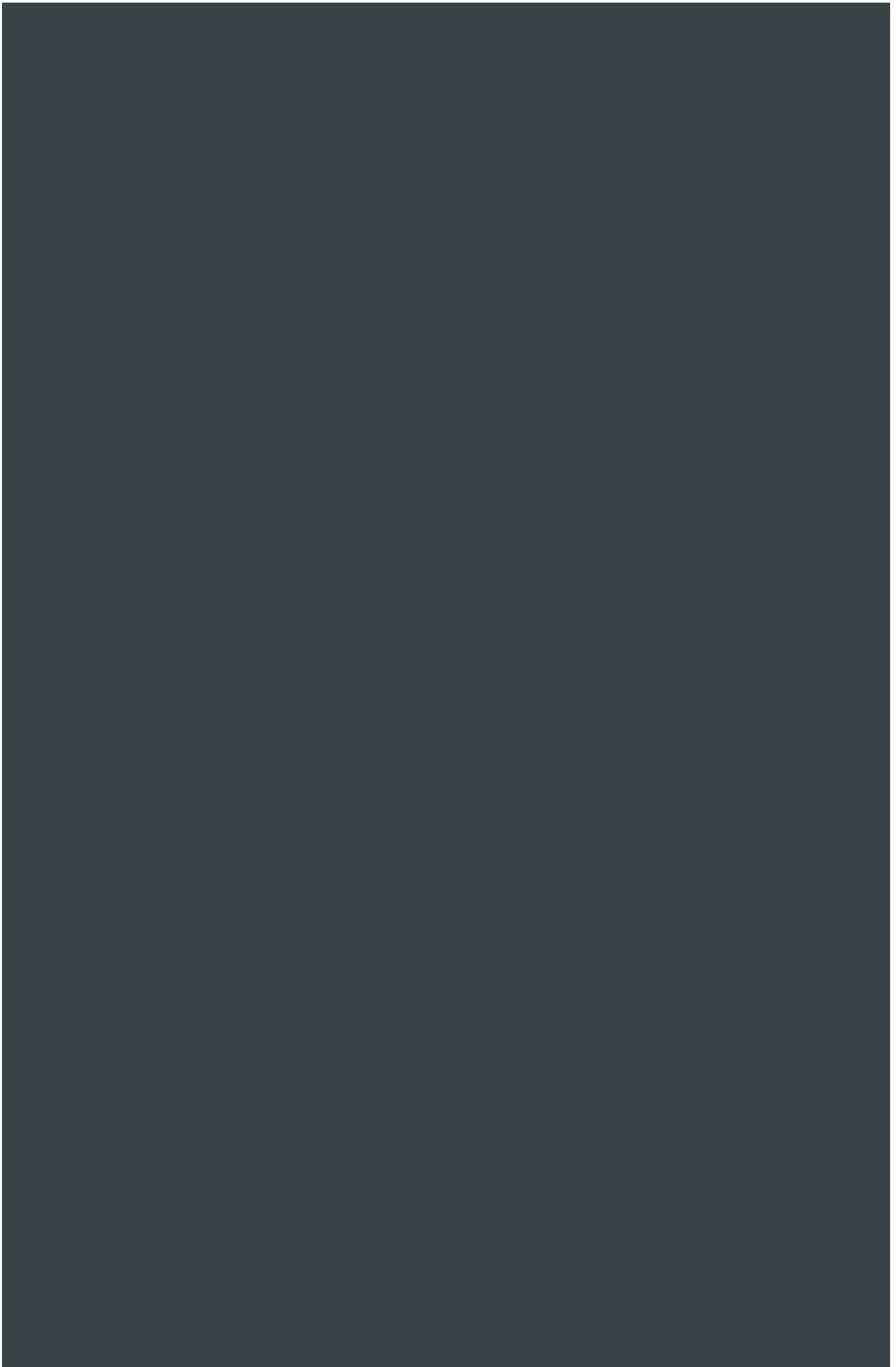


# The Gateways to the Professions Report

## The Government's Response





## Foreword

by Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education & Skills

The Gateways to the Professions report was commissioned in response to concerns about the potential impact on entry to the professions when the new higher education funding regime is introduced in 2006. The Government is extremely grateful to Sir Alan Langlands for his report, which is accepted in full and published alongside this document.

Sir Alan's report reflects consultation with a wide range of professions, higher education institutions and other interested parties. It provides a very thorough analysis of the issues and sets out a number of recommendations and challenges for government, employers, professional bodies and higher education institutions. I hope that the report, and our response to it, will reassure those who expressed concern about the impact of the new arrangements on those entering the professions.

We are committed to making sure that anyone with the ability to go to university has the opportunity to do so whilst also ensuring equality of opportunity for all disadvantaged groups. There has never been a better time for students from poorer backgrounds to enter higher education. The new package of support we are introducing for students in higher education in 2006/07 will mean that no eligible student will have to pay anything before or whilst they are studying. Students from less well-off families will also benefit from the new maintenance grant. We expect that 55 per cent of all new full time students will qualify for a full or partial grant, and further help will be available by way of bursaries from higher education institutions. This means that the poorest students will have a minimum of £3,000 in non-repayable support. It also means that students will be given wider access and opportunities to pursue the professional careers they may have felt were unattainable in the past.

In accepting Sir Alan's recommendations we are also supporting the strong sense of partnership which he wishes to encourage. Building on the partnership working that is already underway, we therefore propose to create a development fund to carry work forward across the recommendations. Up to £6 million will be made available over the next three years to support collaborative projects in the key areas suggested by Sir Alan. Partners will be invited to submit collaborative proposals which will attract matched resources from the development fund.

Collaborative working is an important part of ensuring that the doors are fully opened for all those wanting to enter the professions. That is why I am also supporting the establishment of a forum for sharing and developing recruitment and retention strategies. I believe the forum will be key in helping to take forward Sir Alan's recommendations and am confident that this joint working will enable many of the issues raised by Sir Alan to be addressed for the benefit of the professions and the economy.

Ruth Kelly

## The Government's Response to the Recommendations

The text below details the Government's response to each of the 19 recommendations and is set out in the following way:

- > Explanation of the key stages
- > Text of the Gateways to the Professions Recommendations
- > Acceptance status of the recommendation
- > The Government's response

In taking the recommendations forward, we and our partners will ensure that we pay due regard to the principles of better regulation, keeping to a minimum the bureaucratic burden and impacts on employers, the professional bodies, the front line staff in HE institutions and the students themselves. All major implementation strands will be subject to independent review through the gatekeeper mechanisms established by DfES, such as the Higher Education Regulatory Review Group (HERRG).

### The key stages

The key recommendations in the report are framed by the four stages that people normally experience when entering the professions. In practice there may be some overlap between these stages eg the period of study and entry to employment sometimes overlap.

- > Stage 1: Initial decision making prior to entry to higher education
- > Stage 2: Application to higher education
- > Stage 3: Period of study
- > Stage 4: Entry to and retention in employment

## Stage 1: Initial decision making prior to entry to higher education

### Recommendation 1

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), working with the Sector Skills Councils, Regional Development Agencies and those responsible for careers information, advice and guidance should provide development funding to support employers, professional bodies and universities to take forward collaborative projects aimed at:

- changing unhelpful stereotypical images about the professions;
- ensuring that young people and those who advise them, including parents and carers, have access to resources about the career opportunities that exist in each profession, the different routes available, and the qualifications and experience required for entry;
- developing flexible recruitment and training strategies for older workers and people who wish to change careers.

### Accepted

The Government accepts that there is a need to consider collaborative proposals that build on those that are already in place. For example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is responding to our request to look at support for strategic subjects by developing a range of collaborative projects which affect entry into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. Another example is the commitment by the Office of Science and Technology to provide nearly £7 million over the next 3 years to the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering & Technology (SET) to provide advice on how to tackle the barriers which prevent girls and women pursuing careers in certain SET careers. The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), in collaboration with the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team and the Higher Education Academy's Learning and Teaching Support Network, have also supported a project to develop student employability profiles for Subject Centres to use with their academic communities and students.

We think it is important that these types of projects add value and do not duplicate other work in progress. It is also important that they are not Government led projects but have the commitment and support from relevant employers and professional bodies. We will therefore provide development funding from the £6 million we are making available over the next three years to support this recommendation.

### Recommendation 2

Relevant government departments should also review the effectiveness of current measures to encourage young people from lower socio-economic groups to consider careers in the public sector and the professions. There is a lot of activity in this area and it makes sense to identify which interventions work and then to target resources at these interventions.

### Accepted

We agree that effective evaluation is essential to good policy making, not least in the area of widening participation and recruitment to the professions. We know that there is already excellent practice within some professions. For example, the teaching profession and the armed services continually review the impact of their schemes to attract and retain staff from a wide range of backgrounds, and modify them accordingly.

We are currently evaluating the impact of initiatives like Aimhigher, which is our key national outreach programme to widen participation in higher education. The impact of programmes like these takes time but evidence is available that Aimhigher has led to improvements including: an increase (by 4.6 percentage points) in the proportion of Year 9 pupils attaining levels 4, 5 and 6 in Maths at Key Stage 3; Year 11 participants showing a higher proportion of pupils intending to take part in higher education (by 3.9 percentage points); and a significant improvement in nearly all measures of Year 11 GCSE results, with an average improvement on total points scored of 2.5. Foundation Degrees have also opened up access to higher education for many people and we see them as an important opportunity for those professions where there is a strong emphasis on combining higher education with workplace learning.

In some areas, initiatives have just started and will need to be evaluated in due course. For example, the Legal Services Consultative Panel has recently submitted its recommendation on entry, retention and competition to the legal profession, and in the development of new medical schools the Department of Health has encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to develop outreach programmes into their local communities.

Widening participation in its broadest sense is also about motivation, improvement and progression across and through the whole education system, right from pre-school years. The evaluation evidence we have suggests that intervention at an early stage in a child's education is more effective than seeking to remedy matters later on, and hence we see our investment in early years education and schools as essential long-term contributions to meeting future national skill needs, including in the professions. The new package of support we are introducing for students in higher education in 2006/07 will mean that no eligible student will have to pay anything before or whilst they are studying and the poorest students will have a minimum of £3,000 in non-repayable support.

### **Recommendation 3**

The DfES should consider the scope for clarifying and streamlining the information on financial support available to students entering the professions.

### **Accepted**

To achieve maximum reach for information on student finance, we work with stakeholders in the higher education sector to ensure consistency of message and accuracy of information. In order to streamline this information, we are developing a single point of access on student finance through our website [directgov.uk/student-finance](http://directgov.uk/student-finance), which was launched on 1 September 2005.

There is also the "Guide to Financial Support for HE Students" which is produced each year. This publication is sent to all potential undergraduate students who apply for Student Finance. It includes information linked to the professions and the DfES will be exploring with the authors what additional information should be included in future publications. We also have a widely publicised student support helpline and, to ensure that students are made aware of the overall changes in student support, we are running a TV campaign in Autumn 2005.

In addition to all of this, we plan to work with key professional bodies, relevant employers, government departments and their agencies to provide additional information via the [directgov](http://directgov) website about financial support that might be available to those seeking to enter the professions.

## **Stage 2: Application to higher education**

### **Recommendation 4**

Universities and other higher education institutions and professional bodies should ensure that entry requirements to undergraduate and postgraduate courses do not discriminate against students who have the potential to be successful in their chosen profession solely on the basis of school examination results.

### Accepted

The report of the independent Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group, published September 2004, considered all aspects of the current admissions system in England and included a series of principles of fair admissions that it recommended higher education institutions adopt. The report also recommended the establishment of a centre of expertise in admissions. In response UCAS, on behalf of the higher education sector, is preparing a new programme of work to research, further develop and disseminate expertise in all areas of higher education admissions.

The report's recommendation to implement a system of Post Qualification Applications (PQA) is addressed in a consultation document *Improving the Higher Education Applications Process*, published by the DfES on 9 September 2005. It proposes a number of changes to the higher education applications process to make it fairer for applicants, through better matching of students' aspirations and achievements with courses and institutions. It also discusses the implications of a higher education application cycle whose start date was primarily determined by 'A' level publication dates for those seeking to enter higher education from non-traditional routes. It includes a proposal recommending that work is undertaken to improve the information available to those students in relation to the applications and admissions cycle, so that they may timetable their learning and accreditation accordingly. Two potential options are presented for moving to a PQA system in the longer term. The consultation period will run until 5 December 2005.

### Recommendation 5

Universities and other higher education institutions need to design courses that are increasingly relevant in an international and European context and make use of the Diploma Supplement to ensure the transparency and international comparability of the qualifications gained.

### Accepted

We agree that it is vital that institutions should ensure that the courses they offer can deliver the skills and attributes that individuals need to meet the demands of the modern global economy. The international dimension needs to become a significant and real part of the student learning experience. We are already taking steps which seek to encourage the embedding of work-related skills widely in higher education provision by bringing together key stakeholders, including the higher education sector, employers, Sector Skills Councils and other professional bodies. We will work with these organisations to ensure that the importance of preparing all learners for life in a global society and for work in a global economy is fully recognised and reflected in the courses that are offered to students.

The transparency and currency of UK qualifications across Europe is critical to the mobility of the professions and the Diploma Supplement is a key vehicle through which graduates can present their achievements. We are aware that the recent stocktaking exercise undertaken for the 4th Ministerial conference under the Bologna Process in Bergen identified the implementation of the Diploma Supplement as an area of improvement for the UK. We are also aware that the Europe Unit of UUK is currently conducting a survey on institutions'

implementation of key Bologna reforms, including the Diploma Supplement, and that the results are expected at the end of 2005. In the light of the outcome of that survey, we will be working with HEFCE, UUK and SCOP to identify what more can be done to promote use of the Supplement.

### **Recommendation 6**

Universities and other higher education institutions working with employers and professional bodies should look at the potential for offering bursaries to support students undertaking courses leading to the professions. In particular they should consider offering bursaries to students that are not eligible for the full grant of £2,700 plus bursary of at least £300 and who may be deterred because of the cost from entering the professions. They should also ensure that bursaries are available for longer periods than three years where entry to a profession requires longer periods of study.

### **Accepted**

This recommendation is primarily for institutions to consider. We are encouraged to note that 81% of higher education institutions are already, in their Access Agreements, planning to offer bursaries to students with a family income of up to around £22,000 and 73% are offering bursaries for students with a family income of up to around £33,000. Specific government support is also offered to some public sector professions such as those in health and teaching and a number of professions are offering their own forms of bursary and sponsorship. For most students on undergraduate courses which last for longer than three years we believe that any bursary offers – like the student support arrangements – will continue to apply to them whilst they are on the course.

Institutions, individually and collectively, will naturally want to evaluate the effectiveness of the support they are offering, including how it has affected students who follow courses leading to the professions. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) will also want to consider these questions, once solid evidence is available. So will employers and professional bodies. We are confident that they will rise to this challenge.

### **Recommendation 7**

Relevant government departments, working with universities and other higher education institutions, should continue to look specifically at measures to promote wider and fairer access to courses leading to the professions.

### **Accepted**

The DfES, through the Aimhigher programme which aims to widen participation in higher education generally, has supported a variety of ways of widening access to courses leading to the professions. In the healthcare professions for example it has provided curriculum support in schools, supported e-mentoring of students by healthcare staff, helped young people find out more about the roles of Allied Health professionals; supported the NHS Junior Scholarship scheme; provided opportunities and support for career progression of non-clinical staff through secondments into clinical training posts; and, working with the Department of Health,



has addressed issues affecting access to nursing and midwifery courses by minority ethnic groups where there has been an apparent under-representation by some of those groups.

In addition, all government departments with an oversight of the professions will continue to take an active interest in ensuring that access to those professions is based on merit and aptitude, and not on background. Higher education institutions themselves have shown in their Access Agreements that they take access and participation very seriously, and all concerned will want to monitor the effectiveness of the commitments in those Agreements to give extra support to students from less advantaged and non-traditional backgrounds.

### **Stage 3: Period of study**

#### **Recommendation 8**

The DfES should provide development funding to enable employers to work with professional bodies and universities and other higher education institutions to design flexible entry routes into the professions, including fast track and part-time routes. The Higher Education Academy and Sector Skills Councils may be able to play a role in supporting this work.

#### **Accepted**

We know that higher education has a long tradition of supplying graduates for the labour market and recent work carried out by CIHE shows a wide range of degrees are providing graduates with employability skills that employers demand. But the best arbiters of the knowledge and skills that graduates need are the employers themselves; and it is important that they should become much more engaged in working with higher education institutions, for example through their relevant Sector Skills Council or professional body, to influence the content and delivery of degrees. The recent expansion of Foundation Degrees has enabled colleges and universities to provide flexible vocational courses designed with, and delivered by, employers to meet skill shortages at the associate professional/higher technician level, which in turn can provide routes into the major professions such as health, teaching and social care.

But there are areas where it is felt higher education could raise its game. We are therefore working with partners to see how we might stimulate more activity. A system more responsive to needs of employers and their workforce would help employers meet their higher level skills requirements whilst at the same time providing opportunities to encourage more co-financed provision. Co-financed provision provides opportunities, particularly for large companies, to work with higher education institutions to develop customised, degree-based, in-house education and development programmes for staff with potential. To make this work will require more emphasis on assessment and accreditation of in-house training and development linked to credit based schemes. The DfES is currently providing development funding in excess of £1 million for a number of projects to support collaborative working between employers and higher education institutions.

Better links between employers and higher education institutions are key in moving towards responsive higher education provision. HEFCE has provided £3 million in funding through its Strategic Development Fund to encourage the development of flexible learning pathways,

including accelerated degrees; and the Higher Education Academy is already engaging with relevant Sector Skills Councils. In light of this, we will consider with relevant stakeholders how development funding, from the £6 million we are making available over the next three years, could add value to our employer engagement strategies.

### **Recommendation 9**

Universities and other higher education institutions, working with financial institutions and the National Union of Students (NUS), should provide students with information and advice about managing their finances and how to avoid unnecessary debt.

### **Accepted**

Whilst universities and other higher education institutions are not required to provide financial advice, we are of course concerned that students should be aware of good practice in financial management. Many institutions or student unions have advisors who give advice on funding sources and offer debt counselling to students in financial difficulties. Edge Hill College of Higher Education, for example, has developed a computer-based interactive budget sheet, which students use to get an accurate and visual image of their finances. Representatives from around 300 institutions are members of the National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA). The DfES works closely with NASMA and in support of this recommendation has agreed to discuss this issue with NASMA and other relevant organisations, including the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE) and the NUS, to explore whether more might be done to ensure that students have access to financial information and advice throughout their period of study.

### **Recommendation 10**

The DfES should provide modest support to professional bodies to enable an effective dialogue with schools and universities.

### **Accepted**

This recommendation is closely linked to the proposals in Recommendations 1 and 8 and we therefore propose to incorporate the suggested support to professional bodies into the collaborative working which will emerge from those projects and partnerships.

### **Recommendation 11**

The DfES should monitor the impact of the new flexibilities being introduced from 2006/07 in the application of previous study rules relating to those entering the professions.

### **Accepted**

We felt the complexity of the current previous study rules made them difficult to understand and administer. The revised rules are simpler and more supportive of those undertaking less traditional routes through higher education. The new rules will also allow all students greater flexibility to take breaks in their studies. Those who wish to study in one of the specific professions (for example doctors, dentists and vets) but already have an honours degree will still be eligible for a maintenance loan, unlike those students undertaking a second honours degree that is not in one of these professions.

The flexibilities that are introduced may be of particular benefit to those professions involving longer courses as students will have the opportunity to interrupt their studies if desired.

It is difficult to gauge when we will start to see the effect of the revised rules, but we will of course monitor the changes and consider whether any amendment will be required in the future.

### **Recommendation 12**

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) should work with universities and other higher education institutions to review the supply and demand for academics providing professional education and give advice to DfES Ministers on action required by government to ensure adequate recruitment and retention of high quality staff.

#### **Accepted**

As autonomous employers, universities and other higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the recruitment and retention of their own staff. We do however recognise the importance of ensuring that there is an adequate supply of high quality staff, and to this end have provided significant funding in support of recruitment and retention. From 2005 onwards, HEFCE is undertaking an annual analysis of the most up to date information on the recruitment and retention of academic staff. This will put them in a strong position to identify trends, to make projections, and to advise on actions needed to meet the challenges in particular discipline areas. Within this work, the DfES has asked HEFCE to include a particular focus on those providing professional education.

### **Recommendation 13**

HEFCE should also monitor the number of graduates who continue to higher degrees and, with the research councils, consider the levels of support required by home/EU postgraduate students.

#### **Accepted**

As with Recommendation 12, we recognise the need to ensure that appropriate levels of support are in place to recruit and retain the right number of high quality people into postgraduate study. The supply of highly skilled postgraduate research degree graduates is key to enhancing the research intensity of the UK economy and the development of the professions. Against this backdrop, and within the context of the Government's Science and Innovation Framework 2004-2014, HEFCE will continue to monitor both the number of new entrants to, and qualifiers from, research degree programmes, paying particular attention to trends by subject area. We will also consider further with the research councils and others the appropriate levels of support for postgraduates if circumstances warrant it.

## Stage 4: Entry to and retention in employment

### Recommendation 14

Employers should review their recruitment and retention strategies to ensure that they provide equal access to professional job opportunities and avoid discriminatory employment practices.

#### Accepted

Entry to the professions goes further than widening participation and access to higher education. It is also about workforce planning to meet the needs of the economy. We already have well developed workforce strategies in the public sector. In parallel, we would hope to influence employers in the private sector to ensure they recruit the high quality workforce they want in a fair and open way. We have important links with professional bodies, employer organisations and trades unions, and will consider how we can use these to encourage employers in both the public and private sectors to ensure their recruitment and retention strategies meet the demands of the economy as well as their own needs. Employers and higher education institutions are also aware of the importance of employability skills and we will continue to work with these and other partners, building on our past investment, to ensure graduates are fully prepared for work.

### Recommendation 15

Employers, relevant government departments, professional bodies and public sector agencies responsible for entry into the public sector professions should share good practice, research and evaluation about the impact and effectiveness of recruitment and retention measures. Particular emphasis should be given to measures that are successful in widening the social mix of entrants to the professions.

#### Accepted

A number of government departments already have well established procedures for working with relevant employers and professional bodies. The Department of Health has developed the NHS Careers organisation to address particular issues concerning recruitment, along with the Improving Working Lives initiative. The Armed Forces work together through the Defence Recruiting Committee to learn from others' techniques and experiences, and the Department for Constitutional Affairs supports the Standing Conference on Legal Education, which has contributed to its paper on Entry to, and Retention in, the Legal Profession.

The work of the Gateways to the Professions Reference Groups and that of the Inter-Departmental Group established by Sir Alan Langlands provided an excellent forum for sharing good practice across professions and government departments, and we feel there would be some benefit to all stakeholders in establishing a collaborative forum for the sharing and development of recruitment and retention strategies. Building on Sir Alan's report, we hope it will provide a framework within which representatives from all the stakeholder groups will continue to work together in the future to address the issues facing the professions. The DfES will consider how to take this forward in consultation with the relevant organisations.

### **Recommendation 16**

The Government should ask the Pay Review Bodies to monitor the impact of the introduction of variable fees and the new student support measures on recruitment and retention and whether additional forms of support (for example bursaries and golden hellos) should be considered, particularly for those who do not receive the full grant of £2,700 plus a bursary of at least £300. Pay Review Bodies should also be asked to identify instances where the effect of student debt is to strengthen the case for higher starting salaries in key professions.

### **Accepted**

All government departments and public bodies with responsibility for the key public services covered by Pay Review Bodies are responsible for considering recruitment and retention strategies within their sector (ie Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills, the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office). We believe this is right as each of the sectors face their own challenges in addressing workforce issues. We do however agree that each Department should liaise with the relevant Pay Review Bodies to discuss appropriate mechanisms to take forward this recommendation within their remit.

### **Further work**

### **Recommendation 17**

The Government should ask the Independent Commission which will be set up to review the impact of the first three years of variable fees to look again at the gateways to the professions and comment on whether the concerns raised at this stage about entry to the professions are justified by experience, particularly in relation to those that do not receive the full grant of £2,700 plus a bursary of at least £300.

### **Accepted**

We will recommend that the Independent Commission considers the impact of variable fees on the entry to the professions as part of its Terms of Reference, and also refer it to the conclusions of the Gateways to the Professions report. We anticipate that the Commission will be in a position to consider at that time the implications for the professions in any changes to the mix of subjects taken by students.

### **Recommendation 18**

Specifically, the Independent Commission should focus on the 'rate of return' (and therefore the *total* benefits and costs) of higher education leading to professional careers and make recommendations on earnings thresholds, the level of variable tuition fees, grants, bursaries and interest rates on student loans.

### Accepted

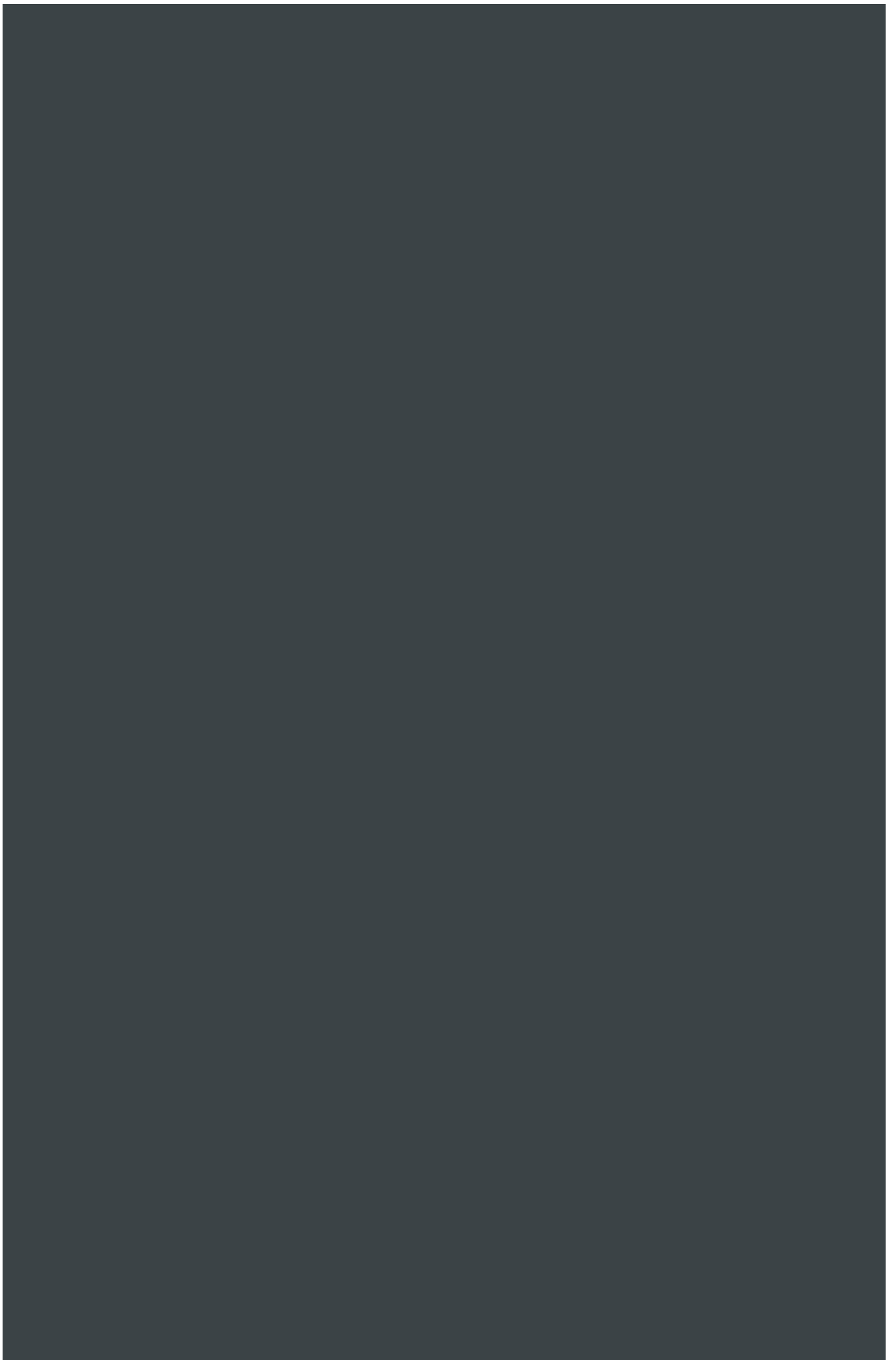
We already know that those with a first-degree are estimated to earn on average around £120,000 more - in present value terms - over their working lives than those with two or more A-levels. And whilst graduate earnings do vary by subject studied, class of degree and institution attended, there is no reason to suspect that, after accounting for these factors, graduate returns are lower for any particular social class. However, we should not be complacent about this and will work with professional bodies and other relevant organisations to ensure the Commission has the available data and information about any different rates of return to inform any suggestions it wishes to make about the student support package overall in the context of variable fees. Any particular observations relating to the professions would also be welcome.

### Recommendation 19

The DfES should work with employers, professional bodies and universities and other higher education institutions to monitor trends in the profile of recruitment into the professions and consider if further research is required.

### Accepted

Our Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners is committed to good engagement between employers and higher education to boost innovation and skills. Recruitment and retention into the professions is a important part of this and will be a key strand in our employer engagement strategy. We will consider this issue with relevant partners and stakeholders and also ensure that any research or findings feed into the Independent Commission to inform their work on the impact of variable fees.



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