

Part 4

Summary report on the use of Access Funds in 1999-2000

Introduction

1. This report provides a summary of the information returned by HEFCE-funded institutions in receipt of student support funding during the academic year 1999-2000. It evaluates the monitoring process itself and then analyses the data from the returns in order to identify significant trends. The tables at Appendix 1 summarise spending in 1999-2000.

Funds available

2. For the academic year 1999-2000, the DfEE gave the HEFCE a total of £74,600,000. This was split as follows:

- ? Undergraduate Fund – £43,923,210
- ? Postgraduate Fund – £6,114,600
- ? Further Education Fund – £917,190
- ? Fee Waiver Fund – £11,645,000
- ? one-off allocation in January 2000 – £12,000,000.

3. In January 2000 institutions were also allocated £428,829 in funds returned from previous years, making the total funds available £75,028,829. Of these, a total of £112,577 was passed to the Teacher Training Agency for schools-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) students.

4. The DfEE allocated an additional £1.3 million from the user support baseline to the Further Education Funding Council for the HE students in further education colleges.

Allocation

5. The individual allocations to institutions were published in HEFCE 99/50 'Access Funds for higher education institutions 1999-2000'. The allocation was made on the basis of the number of full-time equivalent students, weighted according to level and mode of study, and age group and affluence.

Commentary

6. Following an internal audit of our systems in 1999-2000 we introduced a new system for monitoring student support funding by using electronic monitoring returns. An individualised monitoring disk was sent to institutions for completion for return by 7 November 2000. The monitoring return captured information on the main spend for 1999-2000 and mid-year information for 2000-01 on Mature Student Bursaries. The analysis of the Mature Student Bursary data will be captured in the report for 2000-01.

7. Overall the quality of the data was better than in 1998-99, but only 66 per cent of institutions submitted on time. The remaining 34 per cent of institutions submitted data late.

The majority of outstanding data was received by the end of November, but some institutions did not submit data until December. This had an impact on the Council's ability to model outstanding allocations, for Fee Waiver Funds and Mature Student Bursaries. The delay meant that institutions were not notified of their remaining allocations until January 2001.

8. We have reviewed the structure of the monitoring return following the exercise and will issue more detailed guidance notes for 2000-01, taking into account those areas where HEIs highlighted difficulties.

Analysis

9. The analysis describes the trends in the spending during 1999-2000 and compares these trends with the spend in 1998-99 where appropriate. The comparisons between 1998-99 and 1999-2000 have been made on a proportional basis; partly because in 1998-99 some of the data were missing and therefore it is not appropriate to compare amounts, and partly because there has been an overall increase in funding.¹

Table 1a: Payments for general access (excluding payments for part-time fee remission)

10. The data show that in 1999-2000 the bulk of payments made for general access (excluding fee remission) were given to full-time undergraduate students, the greatest proportion of which were given to mature or young mature students. This reflects the accepted view that older students generally have higher costs than younger students, and fewer sources of alternative support. The fact that the main group to benefit were older students also shows that the criteria for Hardship Funds are functioning correctly, especially as this group is likely to contain the highest proportion of lone parents. Taking into account the proportions in each age group in the eligible population, mature and young mature students at each level of study were more likely than young students to receive payments from the Hardship Funds, with mature students likely to receive the greatest level of award.

11. In comparison with 1998-99 there has been a decrease in the number of part-time undergraduates that received a payment. This could have been caused by the increase in general of full-time students, compared to part-time, or it could be because the part-time students on benefits can apply for fee remission so they no longer need so much help from the main access funds for other purposes.

12. Students with dependants accounted for 16 per cent of the number of payments but for over a quarter of total payments made, indicating that where they receive a payment it is likely to be greater than for students without dependants. Disabled students are also likely to receive a higher level of payment than average. In comparison with 1998-99 the average payment given to students with disabilities has almost doubled in size.

¹Note the following definitions: young = under 21, young mature = 21-24, mature = 25 plus

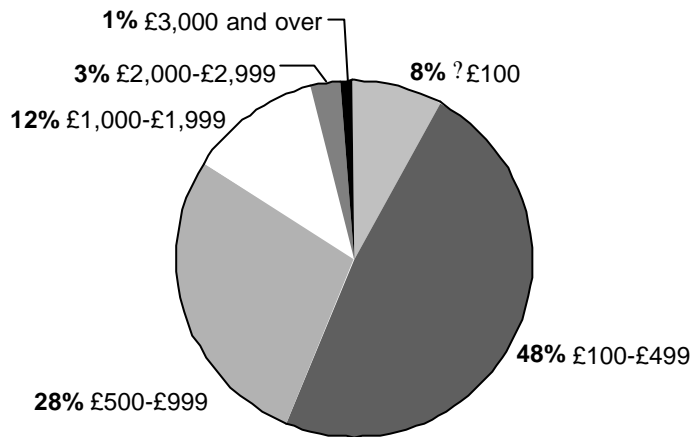
Table 1b: Payments for fee-remission – part-time undergraduate students only

13. The pattern of fee-remission payments mirrors the patterns seen in Table 1a. The majority (87 per cent) of students who received a Fee Waiver were mature, and met the criteria that they were on benefit or a low income.

Table 2: Details of level of payments for general access

14. Overall 83 per cent of the students received support in the form of a non-repayable loan. This represents 93 per cent of the total amount of funding available. The remaining students received repayable loans. The number of payments in each category were split in the following proportions:

Figure 1 Details of level of payment for general access

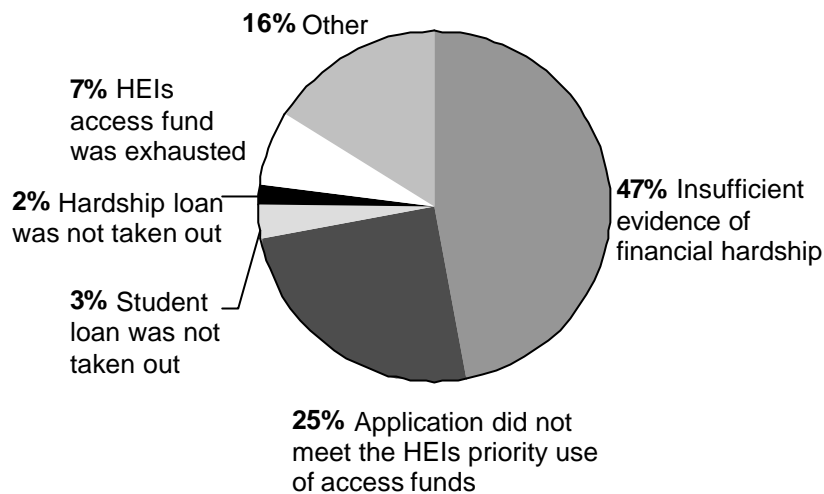


15. The proportions for 1998-99 in each level of payment category were similar to 1999-2000.

Table 3: Refusals

16. As the chart below indicates, the highest proportion of refusals were returned against the reason 'insufficient evidence of financial hardship'. The low percentages recorded against student and hardship loans not being taken out shows that the majority of students are taking up their other entitlements.

Figure 2 Reasons for refusals



17. The proportion of refusals returned against each reason was similar in 1998-99.

Table 4: Arrangements made for targeting access funds at students in real need

18. Table 4 (not reproduced in Appendix 1) collected textual evidence from HEIs on the arrangements within institutions. A wide range of activities were mentioned. They are listed below in order to disseminate good practice and ideas that might be helpful to institutions.

- a. Information technology. HEIs used web-sites, intranets and e-mails to both staff and students to advertise funds. Some provided on-line applications.
- b. Pre-entry. This consisted of open days, and tutors visiting schools and feeder colleges to inform them what student support is available from the HEI. Pre-induction information was also sent out, and in some cases pre-assessments were undertaken.
- c. Post-entry. Some HEIs conduct 'surgeries' for students experiencing difficulty. In one case the surgery was held off-site.
- d. Publicity. HEIs make substantial use of the standard methods, including posters, flyers, booklets, guides for parents. Some HEIs place articles in the local press.
- e. Infrastructure. Some HEIs have acted to improve their infrastructure, for example by developing their student referral mechanisms further. Other HEIs are maximising the use of management information systems. One HEI uses the financial notification from LEAs to target students who are in receipt of full loans and fee remission. Getting more relevant information from application forms is another popular method. Many HEIs used the information they have to target mail shots and information to specific groups. For example, one HEI targeted students who had to give up jobs in their final year. Other approaches include starting up 'one stop shops' or realigning internal criteria to match the priority groups highlighted by the Government.

- f. Staff. Some HEIs are appointing more staff to deal with student support issues, others are training existing academic and administrative staff to help them provide a better, more informed service to students. Using tutors to target needy students was a popular approach.
- g. Collaboration. Several HEIs mention using the DfEE's good practice guide and the value of attending training seminars and other similar events. One HEI mentioned liaising with other institutions in order to develop best practice further.

Table 5: Reasons for payment

19. The data in this table show that the highest number and level of payments were for accommodation costs. Also, a large proportion of funds was spent on childcare costs and utility costs. The average payment was greatest for childcare costs, as might be expected from the data returned in Table 1a(ii).

20. The 1998-99 data showed a similar picture to 1999-2000, with a small increase in the proportion of spending on accommodation and a small decrease in the proportion of spending on books and equipment.

Table 6: Loans for repayment

21. The data for 1999-2000 shows that institutions have successfully recouped 69 per cent of loans that were paid out. The majority of the funding (64 per cent) was used for students who did not have loan cheques, and the minority (36 per cent) was given for other reasons. The data for this table were not captured in 1998-99.

Table 7: Periodic information and interest earned

22. The amounts of interest institutions are earning, and the amount being paid out in audit costs is in line with Council expectations. A comparison with the data from 1998-99 shows that in 1999-2000 institutions paid out a greater proportion of their funding in the 1 September to 31 December period. This is likely to be due to an increase in payments made for loans cheques that were delayed.

Table 8: Summary

23. The summary table shows that institutions have spent 96 per cent of the funding available. Of the remaining funds, 4 per cent will be carried forward to 2001-02 and 1 per cent will be reclaimed by the Council. (Percentages do not add up owing to rounding errors).

Conclusion

24. Overall the monitoring return data show that student support funds have been used successfully to target the groups identified by the Government. Table 8 shows that the vast majority of the funding was spent, with only small amounts of funding carried forward or returned to HEFCE. We intend to provide data from the monitoring return, the good practice publications and seminars to inform institutions' forward planning in relation to student support.