

HEFCE Regional consultants

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Summary of responses to the consultation on widening participation (HEFCE 00/50)

1. Institutions were asked to respond first by sending comments relating to EiC partnerships, and second by sending comments relating to the proposals in their entirety. This summary analyses the comments on the overall proposals. A total of 78 responses were received: 67 from higher education institutions, seven from further education colleges and four from HE-related organisations – Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP), the Universities Association for Continuing Education (UACE) and NATFHE (the university and college lecturers' union). This represents an overall HE sector response rate of 50 per cent.

2. Broadly speaking, institutions welcomed the Excellence Challenge and were supportive of the Government's target that 'by 2010, 50 per cent of young people should have the opportunity to benefit from HE by the time they are 30'. HEIs also specifically welcomed the funding that was being made available to them within the Excellence Challenge.

Policy

3. Institutions commented on the policy approach underlying the proposals outlined in the Excellence Challenge document and the HEFCE publication, and commented on the effect the proposals might have on the HEFCE's relationship with the sector.

4. Most institutions agreed with the high level policy target, but they voiced concerns that the proposals sought to achieve the target by taking an exclusive approach which limited the target groups and geographical areas that would benefit from the funding. A significant number of HEIs were disappointed that the Excellence Challenge was focused only on young disadvantaged students. They argued that the Government was unlikely to realise its target if its initiatives continued to neglect other vulnerable groups, such as mature students.

5. Several institutions expressed concern that the proposals related mainly to full-time courses, and that there was little provision for part-time students who were equally, if not more, disadvantaged. HEIs were also concerned at the emphasis on obviously 'gifted and talented' students, and were keen to stress that much widening participation activity was driven by the desire to encourage the hidden potential in school pupils and adults.

6. HEIs raised the issue of geographical discrimination in the first part of the consultation on EiC partnerships, and this was re-emphasised in the second round of responses. They felt that the geographical focus of the Excellence Challenge was too narrow and that vulnerable groups in rural and non-EiC areas (including phase 3 EiC areas) would be disadvantaged by the proposals. There was a particular concern that less work might be undertaken in these areas because of the emphasis on EiC areas. This reflected some

confusion within HEIs about how the Excellence Challenge should be integrated with their existing efforts to widen participation.

7. HEIs also questioned the rationale for distributing the new money between core and project funding. For example, one respondent suggested that the money being spent on HE summer schools would be better targeted if it were used to increase the postcode premium. Others suggested that the money made available for aspirational funding should also be added to the postcode premium. Such views seemed to reflect wider anxieties about the perception that the Government wants the sector to blur the existing divides between different kinds of institutional mission.

8. In terms of the HEFCE's relationship with the sector, a few HEIs commented that they perceived a shift in policy in the proposals, from an approach that prioritised collaboration to one that prioritised individual HEIs. Institutions also expressed anxiety that the new proposals would add to their accountability burden. Most respondents cited the administration of the Opportunity Bursaries as a particular source of concern. Indeed more comments were made about the Opportunity Bursary scheme than any other issue. There were also comments that the proliferation of short-term schemes had a negative impact on HEIs' ability to plan strategically.

Specific themes

9. This section outlines some of the issues raised in relation to specific areas.

Institutional strategies

10. Most respondents did not comment specifically on the proposal that institutions should submit new widening participation strategies. Of those who did comment, the majority were in favour of the proposal, and indeed some institutions had already begun revising their strategies. A small number of HEIs commented that the timetable for submission would present problems, but most welcomed integrating the statements with the annual operating statement cycle.

11. In more detailed comments, respondents raised the HEFCE's overall approach towards the strategies, and the issue of target setting. A significant number of institutions felt that the wording of the consultation document implied that the HEFCE would approve the new strategies and the activities outlined. For example, Annex C of HEFCE 00/50 was interpreted as a list of prescriptive activities. HEIs were concerned that the HEFCE should not prescribe the format and targets of the strategies. The response from Universities UK supported this view and suggested that the HEFCE should continue to use a non-prescriptive approach.

12. Most of those who commented were supportive of the need for targets, recognising that they could aid the effective definition and measurement of widening participation activity. However, respondents that were both for and against target setting expressed the same concerns about the ability of HEIs to set realistic, meaningful and achievable targets. Target

setting was perceived as problematic because institutions did not have control over all the factors that influenced the recruitment, retention and progression of under-represented groups, and therefore found it difficult to predict and evaluate the outcomes of their activities. Complicating factors included the need to balance recruitment numbers, and the long-term nature of widening participation activity. It was also acknowledged that some institutions might not have access to the kind of data that would inform effective target setting.

Funding proposals

13. Institutions commented on the division of the new funding between core, project and student support streams. The majority of those who commented specifically on the postcode premium welcomed the increase in the level of funding. A number of institutions commented that the increase would still not recognise the actual extra costs related to the recruitment, retention and progression of students from under-represented groups, and wished to see the premium increased further. Some institutions expressed continuing concerns about the allocation method, but this was balanced by others who accepted that postcode data are the best measure currently available for assessing disadvantage.

14. Respondents also commented on the new proposals to fund aspirational activity. Of those who commented, the majority were against the proposals by a ratio of 2:1. Institutions were mainly concerned that those who had a good track record in widening participation activity were not being rewarded for their efforts, while institutions who were perceived as poor at widening participation were being given extra resources. HEIs also argued that the development of the aspirational funding stream would encourage divisiveness in the sector, especially as the allocation method did not reward all HEIs with pockets of the highest quality provision.

Summer schools

15. A substantial number of institutions commented favourably on the HE summer schools programme and supported the continuation of the scheme beyond 2003-04. Some were concerned that the summer schools had recruited children who were not disadvantaged, and urged that disadvantaged children should continue to be the target group.

Opportunity Bursaries

16. The largest number of comments were made in relation to Opportunity Bursaries. The scheme was welcomed, but concerns were raised about a number of issues. In particular, respondents commented that the amount of the bursary (£2,000), and the actual number of bursaries available, were not enough to make an appreciable difference to the numbers of students entering from disadvantaged backgrounds. Those who commented also highlighted concerns about the increasing complexity of the student support system. There was support for the idea that the Opportunity Bursaries should be administered centrally, or by local education authorities. HEIs were also frustrated by the rapid introduction of the scheme, which was making it difficult for them to get it running efficiently in year one.

Administrative costs

17. A large number of institutions welcomed the money being made available for the administration of student support measures, although it was also recognised that in many cases this funding would only contribute to the actual costs of administration. The cost of administering student support was rising as the system became more complicated. A small number of HEIs were also concerned that the HEFCE intended to prescribe the use of the funding.

Excellence in Cities phase 1 and phase 2 local education authority areas

Phase 1

Birmingham
Bradford
Camden
Corporation of London
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith & Fulham
Haringey
Islington
Kensington & Chelsea
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Lewisham
Liverpool
Manchester
Newham
Rotherham
Salford
Sheffield
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster

Phase 2

Barking and Dagenham
Brent
Bristol
Ealing
Gateshead
Halton
Hartlepool
Hull
City of Leicester
Middlesbrough
Newcastle upon Tyne
North Tyneside
City of Nottingham
Redcar and Cleveland
Rochdale
St Helens
Sefton
Solihull
South Tyneside
Stockton
Stoke on Trent
Sunderland
Wirral

Education Action Zones which are not located in Excellence in Cities areas phase 1 and 2

Ashington
Barnsley
Barrow
Bedford
Blackburn with Darwen
Bolton
Bridgwater
Brighton
Camborne, Pool and Redruth
Clacton and Harwich

Herefordshire
Kent-Somerset Virtual
Leigh (Wigan)
Leigh Park
New Addington
North-East Derbyshire Coalfields
North Gillingham
North-West Shropshire
Oxford
Peterlee

Corby	Plymouth
Coventry	Preston
Derby North-East	Salford and Trafford*
Dudley	Slough
Easington and Seaham	South-East of England Virtual
East Basildon	Southend
Ellesmere Port	Telford and Wrekin
Gloucester	Wakefield
Great Yarmouth	Wednesbury
Grimsby	Weston
Halifax	Withernsea and Southern Holderness
Hastings and St Leonards	Wolverhampton

*The zone covers schools in Salford and Trafford LEAs. Trafford is not an EiC area.

Guidance on content and structure of the strategy and action plan

Strategy

1. As these strategies are intended for use primarily within institutions, we will leave it to institutions to determine the content, length and structure of their strategies, subject to the general definition given in paragraphs 29 -30 of the main document. Institutions will not be required to conform to generic targets or to adopt examples of specific practices.
2. We would encourage all institutions to include:
 - a. Analysis of institutional context, including performance indicator data.
 - b. Objectives which are explicitly linked to the institution's corporate plan.
 - c. Reference to relevant policy processes and changes that are designed to enhance widening participation
 - d. Targets whose achievements can be objectively demonstrated, through milestones or other measurable outcomes.
 - e. Monitoring and evaluation procedures.
3. We would also suggest that institutions address the 'hard issues' of admissions, retention and culture change, as well as the 'softer issues' of awareness and aspiration raising, partnership and mentoring. Retention activities will be particularly important for institutions that have a good record in widening participation, but room for improvement in relation to their performance indicator for student retention.
4. We recommend that strategies should take account of the full range of HEFCE funding streams which support widening participation. These include:

Recurrent funding

- a. Widening participation formula funding (postcode premium).
- b. Aspiration funding (where applicable).

Special initiative funding

- c. Partnership projects. This refers to the regional or sub-regional collaborative projects described in HEFCE 99/07, where we would expect to see project gains embedded in individual institutions.
- d. Student support funding. All institutions receive funding allocations for student support through the hardship, bursary and fee waiver funds. This funding represents an important tool to aid retention by supporting students who might drop out as a result of financial hardship. It would be useful if institutions could demonstrate how the student support funds contribute to the institution's overall widening participation strategy.

- e. HE summer schools (where applicable), funded as part of the Government's wider Excellence in Cities initiative.
 - f. Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund, if projects have a focus on widening participation.
 - g. The forthcoming Active Community Fund, in cases where volunteer opportunities focus on widening participation.
 - h. Funds to support additional student numbers (where applicable and where funded under widening participation criteria).
5. Institutions may wish to include details in their strategy of how they will improve provision for students with disabilities, in particular using their recurrent funding earmarked for this purpose.
6. We would also encourage institutions to include information about the nature and extent of their current involvement in Excellence in Cities areas and Education Action Zones (see Annex C).

Action plan

7. All institutions should submit an accompanying action plan, which should be completed using the template at Annex E. This is available electronically, as part of this document, on the web-site at www.hefce.ac.uk under 'Publications'. The plan should indicate specific actions and targets associated with the following HEFCE funding strands:
- a. The postcode premium.
 - b. Aspiration funding (where applicable). HEIs should provide evidence that they will contribute an element of funding from their own resources from 2002-03. They should also indicate how the activities will be embedded into the institution both during and after the period of funding.
8. Institutions are not required to indicate in the action plan how they will deploy other HEFCE funding streams beyond those in paragraph 7. Where an activity is funded from several sources, the action plan should clearly distinguish between HEFCE funds from the postcode premium and/ or the aspiration premium and other funding sources.
9. Institutions may also wish to provide details of all widening participation activities, regardless of funding stream (for example, if this list has already been prepared as part of their strategic planning process). Any such documentation should be appended to the action plan.
10. The action plan should set out activities and targets related to retention as well as recruitment. It should:
- a. Specify how activities link with the accompanying strategy.

- b. Specify measurable targets and outcomes. These may be periodically revised and updated through the annual operating statement, returned to the Council in July each year.
- c. Demonstrate that arrangements are being put in place to monitor activities effectively. These arrangements are necessary if institutions are to report back on progress towards their targets in the annual operating statement.

Annex E

Action plan

Widening participation activities to be undertaken with HEFCE postcode premium and aspiration premium 2001-02 to 2003-04

Intended activities	How activity relates to accompanying widening participation strategy	Targets	HEFCE funding from the postcode premium and the aspiration funding (where applicable)
<p>Give a brief outline of the proposed activity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • widen participation by under-represented groups, and/or • raise aspirations of state-educated students, and/or • retain students from under-represented groups and enable them to succeed. <p>If the activity is described in the strategy, please state the section(s) or paragraphs. It is not necessary to repeat the detail here.</p> <p>Where an activity will be funded from the aspiration premium (if eligible), please describe how such activities will be embedded and continue when funding is scheduled to cease (after 2003-04)</p>	<p>Please state the section(s) or paragraph(s) of the institution's accompanying widening participation strategy to which this activity most closely relates. The strategy should outline the objectives underpinning this strategy, or it may describe it in more detail.</p>	<p>As set out in paragraphs 32 - 36, both output and outcome targets should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific • measurable so far as possible • realistically challenging, <p>to provide a firm basis for subsequent monitoring. This section should demonstrate that arrangements are being put in place to monitor activities effectively.</p> <p>Annual milestones should be provided, which can be reported on or revised in the annual operating statement in July each year.</p>	<p>We do not require a detailed breakdown of the budget, but an indication of how much of this activity will be funded each year from the postcode premium or the aspiration funding (where applicable).</p> <p>If institutional contributions are also recorded, please clearly distinguish between these and the HEFCE funding from these two streams.</p> <p>Proposed spend for 2001-02 should sum to the amounts announced for these two streams in the institution's July 2001 grant letters.</p> <p>Where an activity will be funded from the aspiration funding (if applicable), please provide evidence that the institution will contribute an element of funding from its own resources from 2002-03.</p>

Cover sheet: widening participation strategy and action plan

(An electronic version of this document, including this form, is on the HEFCE web-site at www.hefce.ac.uk under 'Publications'.)

Contact person

Title Initials Surname

Post held

Institution

Address

Telephone number, including STD code and extension

Fax number

e-mail address

Signature of head of institution, or his or her nominee

Date Day Month Year

Summary analysis of initial strategic statements

1. Initial strategic statements were submitted by HEIs in October 1999, following the request in HEFCE 99/33, 'Widening participation in higher education'. An analysis of these statements was carried out by Action on Access, the HEFCE's national co-ordination team for widening participation.
2. The initial strategic statements were analysed by taking the seven broad criteria outlined in HEFCE 99/33 and dividing them into 12 guidance indicators (see below). The HEFCE regions (including Northern Ireland) were taken as the unit of analysis. The team also factored the size of the statements into their analysis as there were significant differences in the length of the statements submitted.

A	Aims and objectives
A	Mechanisms for achieving aims and objectives
B	Links between objectives and corporate/ financial/other plans
C	Profile of student population, present/potential
C	Use of performance indicators
D	Identification of under-represented groups
D	Targets for under-represented groups
E	Summary of approaches for improving retention for non-traditional students
E	Targets for student retention for non-traditional students
F	Systems for monitoring progress – quantifiable or other
G	Key partners in widening participation strategy implementation
G	Key collaborative relationships in widening participation strategy implementation

3. The reading of each statement was based on the assessed strength of coverage for each of the 12 guidance indicator areas. A numerical value between 0 and 3 was assigned to each guidance indicator according to the assessed strength of the coverage. The scale equates as follows:
 - 0 = not covered
 - 1 = covered
 - 2 = well covered
 - 3 = very well covered.
4. In brief the analysis demonstrated that, while there were many areas of good practice, the statements in general did not take a sufficiently strategic or coherent approach. In particular the team identified insufficient clarity over specific targets related to widening participation, and a fragmented approach to planning.
5. The strongest areas of coverage were:
 - a. Aims and objectives – 45 per cent of HEIs scored 2 or 3.
 - b. Profile of student population present/potential – 44 per cent of HEIs scored 2 or 3.

- c. Mechanisms for achieving aims and objectives – 34 per cent of HEIs scored 2 or 3.
6. The three weakest areas of coverage were:
 - a. Targets for retention for non-traditional students – 89 per cent of HEIs scored 0 or 1.
 - b. Use of performance indicators – 87 per cent of HEIs scored 0 or 1.
 - c. Targets for under-represented groups – 81 per cent of HEIs scored 0 or 1.
7. The analysis showed that some HEIs do not have entirely coherent initial statements. In particular:
 - a. Links were often not made with other strategic documents such as the corporate plan and the equivalent statement on learning and teaching objectives. It was therefore difficult to judge to what degree the approach to widening participation was fully integrated with other institutional activities.
 - b. Institutions appeared to devote more attention to recruitment than to retention.
 - c. Some HEIs failed to make links between their overall strategy and the specific aims and objectives of their regional partnership projects. It was recognised that this was difficult because the projects involved collaboration among a number of institutions. However, the projects were conceived as a means to stimulate demand for HE and were therefore seen as a keystone in the HEIs' individual plans for widening participation.
8. In terms of the sector as a whole the analysis showed that HEIs are not yet good at setting targets, particularly in relation to their overall strategy. However, at the individual level there was a wide spectrum of responses. A minority of institutions have set explicit target outcomes, and many more have set clear measurable targets related to the level and nature of their activities rather than their outcomes. However, too many HEIs have failed to set targets that can be easily measured. This finding is supported by an initial analysis of the sector's annual operating statements for 1999-2000, where institutions reported progress towards targets. The analysis also shows that HEIs generally find it easier to express widening participation targets qualitatively, rather than quantitatively.

Timetable of key stages

27 July 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All HEIs provide updated targets and action plans • Those HEIs which are able submit fully developed three year strategies • The same deadline also applies for return of this year's annual operating statements – see HEFCE 01/23
August and September 2001	HEFCE regional consultants, in consultation with the Action on Access team, review targets (and strategies where submitted)
September 2001	Three year funding allocations confirmed for all those HEIs providing satisfactory targets, action plans and three year strategies
September – November 2001	In the course of normal visits, HEFCE Regional Consultants feed back on action plans and targets and (where provided) strategies
31 October 2001	Deadline for return of full strategies by HEIs that did not provide a complete submission in July
December 2001	HEFCE regional consultants, in consultation with the Action on Access team, review strategies submitted in October
January 2002	Three year funding allocations confirmed for all those remaining HEIs providing satisfactory targets, action plans and three year strategies
January - March 2002	In the course of normal visits, HEFCE Regional Consultants feed back on action plans and targets submitted in October
July 2002	As part of the annual operating statement returns, HEIs report on progress against revised targets and actions for 2001-02