

Sector Impact Assessment – Islamic studies consultation phase

Name of Policy/Initiative	Islamic studies – consultation phase
1. What are the aims of this policy/initiative?	<p>To develop a programme of work to support Islamic studies. This follows the Government’s designation of Islamic studies as a strategic subject in response to the publication of a report by Dr Attaullah Siddiqui, Director of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, titled ‘Islam at Universities in England’. The report was commissioned by the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education and covers a number of areas including the subject of Islamic studies but also the support for Muslim students in higher education (HE).</p> <p>The Islamic studies project team developed its thinking through two consultation events, advice from experts in the field, and the support of other HE funders. This work is designed to enhance the future development of Islamic studies as a strategically important subject in the UK, though our funding powers only extend to English institutions.</p> <p>We are aiming to develop a virtual centre with an online presence to be hosted by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), supported by a dedicated team based within the Academy and events such as conferences and workshops. This will be funded by HEFCE for three years and we aim to develop a sustainability plan for the future through consultation with the sector and the HEA.</p>
2. At what stage of the development process is this SIA being undertaken?	At the end of our consultation period and prior to the development of the network.
3. Do existing data sources enable us to provide evidence of impact? If not, how should be best gather evidence?	<p>Some evidence – there may be issues of public presentation. We have analysed data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency on current provision and student characteristics, staffing levels, recruitment and retention, and commissioned a study of provision in other countries. We are hoping to get more information about private providers, employer needs and quality issues. We will commission work to fill these gaps in our knowledge.</p>
Regulatory impact assessment	
4. Will this policy require higher education institutions (HEIs) to pay for or carry out additional work in response to our demands?	<p>At this stage, the full costs are not confirmed. However, participation in the policy is voluntary, with low costs associated with engagement. We do not anticipate significant future costs for the sector, unless we develop a subscription policy for the virtual network to ensure sustainability. As the provision is small, our Islamic studies work may ultimately have a significant impact on providers that engage with it in terms of administrative and management time/costs, plus some relatively small direct financial costs. We expect these costs will be immaterial in the context of a whole institution, and may be covered by the enhancement of funding.</p> <p>There are marginal sector-wide costs incurred by other organisations, (for example, funding bodies, the Equality Challenge Unit, HEA subject centres). There may be marginal costs connected to other funding programmes.</p>
5. If so, do the benefits of doing this to the delivery of HEFCE strategy, the HE sector, the HEI itself and others outweigh what we have asked HEIs to do?	Recognition of Islamic studies as a strategically important subject is expected to significantly raise the profile and protect the sustainability of providers. The work will also support HEFCE’s business and community objectives in several ways – it will benefit relationships between HE and the wider community, and help HEIs be responsive to

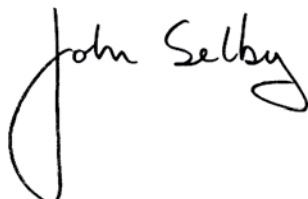
	current issues affecting society. Engagement with the Islamic studies sector has been very positive, and providers have not commented adversely about the cost of engagement with us.
6. How have you arrived at this judgement? Please refer to the results of consultation and other supporting evidence.	There is only a very small amount of additional work and cost for HEIs at this point in responding to this policy initiative, although this cost of engagement will increase in the future as described above. However, the marginal costs for those HEIs involved compared with their positive engagement suggest the benefits outweigh any burden. If, as our programme of work develops, there is additional work it would not necessarily be for individual HEIs to carry out, but would instead be on a broader scale, supported initially by HEFCE.
Equality and diversity	
7. Which individuals or groups are likely to be affected by this policy?	Islamic studies students and teaching staff; academics; a range of stakeholders, such as research councils, student bodies, and any groups affected by those specific stakeholders.
8. What is the likely impact on these groups (is it positive, negative or neutral)?	<p>The programme should have a positive impact on the large proportion of ethnic minority students studying Islamic studies. It will provide a network for students and academics to share their research, meet other researchers, and contribute to the future development of the subject, using online resources and conferences. It will, therefore, make students part of a larger academic community with access to scholars across institutions. This may help address issues about certain groups studying Islamic studies who feel particularly isolated, such as women. We expect that the network will identify such issues and commission any necessary research or activity.</p> <p>Inter-faith networking and dialogue will be encouraged and developed through events and networks and we envisage that public awareness and understanding of Islam will be improved through its research output. There may be a negative impact linked to concerns from other groups about focusing funding on Islamic studies and 'diverting' it from other religions as a result of our equivalent-or-lower-qualifications policy.</p> <p>We are addressing the issue of Christian ministry training through a separate initiative.</p>
9. If negative, what actions have been taken to mitigate the effect?	Our communications strategy will anticipate any negative publicity arising out of negative perceptions around Islam and its occasional perceived association with other issues (for example, terrorism, funding for other religions). We have opened our discussions to the public, via a consultation event in April 2008, which allows other faith groups to comment on our work. We will continue to keep attendees of that meeting informed of developments; the network will be accessible to all; and in developing the network, we will ensure groups that represent all faith studies, such as the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, are included.
10. Can this policy be used to ensure and promote both equality and diversity? If so, how?	An indirect benefit would be enhancing community cohesion and promoting good relationships among stakeholders. The work that we commission and publish will meet the requirements of equalities legislation. The programme will highlight equality and diversity throughout its work and this will be made explicit in the grant letter to the HEA and JISC, who are developing the network.

Sustainable development

<p>11. What is the likely impact of this policy on sustainable development? Is it positive, negative or neutral?</p>	<p>There should be a positive impact on the social justice aspect of sustainable development through benefits to specific communities and relationships between communities. There may be knock-on economic benefits from the additional support provided to the subject generally. The seminars had some degree of negative impact as they require individuals to travel in order to attend. While the virtual network itself should have a minimal impact, the staff support needed and any related events will have a small degree of negative impact.</p>
<p>12. If negative, what actions have been taken to mitigate the impact?</p>	<p>For the previous seminars, we chose central locations easily accessible by public transportation, sent delegate packs out via e-mail, and kept paperwork to a minimum. All correspondence, including seminar reports, has been electronic.</p> <p>We will consider the issues as the programme of work develops - there may be some issues that arise once we have established the programme of work.</p>
<p>13. How can this policy be used to create opportunities to support sustainable development? Please indicate how you have maximised these opportunities or why you have been unable to do so.</p>	<p>Although at this stage we can see the possibility of future opportunities connected to social justice, these are difficult to identify with any certainty at present. We will be revisiting this assessment as the project develops.</p>

Certification by Director

This is a fair assessment of the impact of this policy or initiative on the HE sector, taking into account the regulatory burden imposed. The policy or initiative has been appropriately designed to meet our equality obligations and promote equality and diversity and sustainable development.



Signed
Date

24 October 2008