

Summary of feedback from HE institutions on the HEIF 3 process

Background

1. In November 2006 HEFCE requested feedback from higher education institutions (HEIs) and some regional stakeholders on the process that HEFCE/Office of Science and Innovation (OSI) used to allocate HEIF 3 funding. We requested feedback either directly from individual HEIs, or via the higher education (HE) association in the region. A brief document was supplied by HEFCE/OSI, which set out some suggested topics on which feedback would be particularly welcomed. This paper summarises the key points made by the responses received.

Responses

2. A total of 24 responses were received by 6 December 2006. Twenty were from HEIs, two from HE associations on behalf of HEIs in their region, and two from Regional Development Agencies.

3. A full list of respondents is attached at Annex A.

Guidance documentation and criteria published by HEFCE/OSI

4. On the whole, respondents were very positive about the guidance document. The majority said that the document was clear and easy to understand and included all the information they wanted/needed to have in order to apply for HEIF 3 funding.

5. Most said that the criteria set out for the assessment of institutional plans, competition bids and Centres for Knowledge Exchange (CKEs) updates were clear, and were the right sort of criteria.

6. Some respondents felt that the criteria for the competition were not made clear enough or that HEFCE/OSI had certain expectations of competition bids which were not made clear in the document. Others felt the criteria for the competition should have encouraged continuation of successful HEIF 2 projects, especially those involving regional collaborations.

7. Several people noted positively that the guidance had been based on extensive consultation with the sector and that networking between HEIs had encouraged the sharing of a common understanding of the requirements and criteria.

Templates provided for institutional plans and stage 1 competition bids

8. Respondents said that both templates were easy to use. Most felt they were clear, although some said that it was not entirely clear what was required under some of the section headings.

9. Opinions about the word limits (set at 1,500 for each document) were mixed. Whilst most respondents accepted the need for a word limit, many said the limit set was too low, and that it was difficult for institutions to include all the required information within the limit. However, other respondents were positive about the word limit, and felt it introduced some useful discipline which encouraged them to focus their thinking.

Effort required to apply for funding

10. Almost all responses said that the amount of effort needed for an HEI to prepare its institutional plan, and CKE update (where applicable), was acceptable.

11. A number of people said that the preparation of competition bids required a great deal of work, because of the collaborative nature of most proposals. However, several welcomed the two-stage bidding process, which reduced the amount of effort needed for a first stage bid.

Assessment of institutional plans and CKE updates

12. Respondents were generally satisfied with the assessment of institutional plans and CKE updates.

13. Several respondents said that they would have welcomed more feedback from HEFCE/OSI about the assessment of their institutional plan.

Assessment of competition bids

14. Some respondents said it was difficult to see that competition bids had been judged against the published criteria.

15. Whilst some said that they received adequate feedback on their unsuccessful bids, others felt that the feedback given was not sufficiently specific to the individual bid, or helpful in preparing for future competitions.

16. Some expressed disappointment that HEFCE/OSI had not offered suggestions for failed stage 1 bids to be “matched up” with complimentary successful ones, to initiate an extended and strengthened stage 2 bid.

17. One respondent expressed a concern that the timescale for the competition and the two year funding period was tight, given the criteria for large scale, highly innovative projects.

Formula allocations

18. Feedback on the formula allocations was mixed. A range of views was expressed about the data underlying the formula allocations. Some expressed support for the HE-BCI data used and welcomed funding based on it. Others expressed concerns about the robustness and comparability of higher education-business and community interaction

(HE-BCI) survey data. Some complained that the metrics do not adequately capture all the relevant knowledge transfer (KT) activity.

19. Several respondents expressed concerns that the formula advantages or disadvantages certain kinds of HEIs, irrespective of performance in knowledge transfer.

20. The process of confirming the HE-BCI data and confirming provisional and final allocations received generally positive feedback.

Publication of outcomes

21. Most respondents were generally satisfied with the publication of the funding outcomes by HEFCE/OSI, and felt that the allocations were made in line with the original published criteria.

22. Some felt that more detailed information about the calculation of their formula allocation would have been helpful.

Publication of institutional plans and successful bids

23. Most respondents welcomed the publication of all institutional plans and successful bids by HEFCE/OSI. It was generally welcomed for transparency, for benchmarking between HEIs, and the development of such documents in the future. Most had no concerns about the publication of their own HEI's documents and had little difficulty finding the documents on the website.

24. Some respondents suggested that HEFCE/OSI should also publish some good practice lessons alongside the plans and bids, to further support the development of good practice in the future.

Other

25. Some respondents also commented on other aspects of HEIF or HEFCE/OSI's funding policy which were not directly related to the HEIF 3 process. These will be considered by HEFCE/OSI in planning any future HEIF funding.

Annex A

List of responses to request for feedback on HEIF 3 process

University College London
University of the Arts London
University of Teesside
University of Bedfordshire
Cranfield University
Writtle College
London South Bank University
University of East London
Birkbeck College
University of Gloucestershire
University of Leeds
Trinity & All Saints
Sheffield Hallam University
University of the West of England
Nottingham Trent University
Imperial College London
Dartington College of Arts
Middlesex University
Durham University
Royal College of Music
Advantage West Midlands
East Midlands Development Agency
HE South East
West Midlands HE Association