

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning seminars
September 2003

1. The aim of the seminars was to collect comments on the proposed process for considering bids, and also to consider views on the proposed criteria, 'commended' status, the relationship with the HE Academy and consequences for institutions that are establishing CETLs.
2. The following summary covers the main topics covered by the group discussions.

Purpose of CETLs

3. There was lively discussion on the rationale behind the CETL initiative, clarity of purpose and whether the proposals would benefit enhancement of teaching quality across the sector. Points made in the discussion included:

- The need for CETLs to balance dissemination and collaboration.
- Will all CETLs be 'fit for purpose', or will some purposes/objectives be preferred over others?
- Will CETLs be judged by how closely they match government priorities for higher education (for example, widening participation)?
- The idea of rewarding staff was seen as possibly divisive. More emphasis should be placed on non-pay aspects of recognition.
- There was concern about the use of CETLs in 'league table' style university rankings.
- Continuation and sustainability of CETLs after the end of the five year funded period, and contribution of CETLs to the long term evolution of learning and teaching.
- The timescale for the bidding process raised concerns. Phasing of the initiative might enable institutions to develop more considered proposals.
- There might be tension between rewarding (past) excellence and promoting a developmental role for CETLs.
- Permitting no more than one CETL in an institution would enable funding to be spread more widely across the sector.
- Rewarding CETLs for excellence might give a resource advantage to students who were probably already receiving better than average teaching.
- CETLs should encourage risk-taking and innovation. Failures should be used to identify and disseminate learning across the sector.

4. There was strong support for spending funds as widely as possible and for increasing the number of CETLs beyond the 70 mentioned in the White Paper with corresponding concerns about the divisive effect of competitive funding on institutions.

- Absorbing and managing the funding of a CETL could be destabilising for smaller institutions.
- CETLs could undermine the current TQEF institutional funding for learning and teaching strategies by diverting funds away from reinforcement of such strategies.
- More information is needed on how collaborative/partnership-based CETLs might be managed and financed.
- Current proposals appear to emphasise single institutional bids rather than collaborative bids. The emphasis on institutional learning and teaching strategies might inhibit collaborative bids.
- How will the student voice be heard and how will the CETL bid timetable link with the National Student Satisfaction Survey?

Criteria

5. There was strong support for simplicity and clarity in the assessment criteria for deciding on CETL bids. The criteria need to be flexible and transparent. Overwhelmingly, institutions were keen to be told what to provide rather than trying to second-guess what HEFCE's priorities might be. Among the criteria suggested were:

- value added measures
- evidence of learning outcomes
- potential for CETL to make a significant impact on student experience
- National Student Satisfaction Survey
- evidence of satisfaction of professional bodies with student learning and achievement
- peer review – system of peer reference
- alignment with institutional strategies (learning and teaching, human resources)
- evidence of 'scholarly approach' to teaching (e.g. practitioner research publications, engagement with LTSNs)
- impact of previous funds given for teaching and learning on institutional practice.

Assessment of bids

6. There was a general feeling that more information was needed on how bids would be assessed and by whom.

- Will the peer group be representative; will it include employers; experts from outside UK?
- Will subject or pedagogic specialists be called upon to consider specialist CETL bids?
- Might institutional commitment to bids be tested by some form of interaction with senior institutional managers before decisions on individual bids are made?
- Assessment procedures will need to probe evidence of good practice, not the effect of good writing skills.
- Assessment should also involve rigorous analysis of evidence and institutions' claims and not rely upon peer perception of status and strength.

Commended for excellence

7. Participants did not support use of this designation as a 'consolation' for bids failing to achieve CETL status. It was thought to be potentially confusing, without reputation or financial value, divisive and almost impossible to apply meaningfully to consortium bids.

- Most said that if it was to be used, there must be tangible rewards to give meaning to the label.
- What value would it have? If a bid is unsuccessful at the second stage but wins a 'commended' label, how long could the label be used for? Should the duration of the label be included in the strapline if used by an institution for publicity purposes.
- Could the label be separated from the five year duration of the CETLs?
- Better that some funds should be held back and used for the 'commended' institutions to support and encourage further institutional investment and development.
- The use of both CETL and 'commended' status for marketing purposes needed more consideration. At what point would provision regarded in 2004-05 as excellent cease to be excellent? How much use would CETLs or 'commended' status be in ten years' time if the CETL initiative was limited to a single bid?
- The use of 'commended' status potentially confuses HEFCE's role with that of the QAA in denoting outcomes of institutional quality audit.