

Annex F

Case studies of good practice

1. Our review of institutions' July 2000 annual operating statements identified a number of examples of good practice, in terms of both institutions' use of funds from major HEFCE strategic funding initiatives, and the discussion about the achievement of their plans and the future activities in the AOS. These examples of good practice are illustrated by the case studies below.

Widening participation

2. Student-related funding for widening participation is allocated to institutions in direct proportion to their success in recruiting students from low-participation areas. This funding recognises the success of institutions in recruiting disadvantaged students and the extra cost of enabling them to succeed.

A research-intensive university

This pre-1992 university has a strong commitment to enhancing its research profile but has as a key objective a determination to increase both the number and range of its students.

Its initial statement on widening participation, submitted in October 1999, identified the broad areas in which it would be active: raising aspirations and pre-entry preparation; developing its curriculum; supporting students and enhancing their employability; and developing the university's internal capability.

In its AOS it reported on all these and linked them to its work in the major HEFCE-funded special initiative in widening participation. It reported activities in all the areas described above, in each case describing both the activities and the achievements, frequently in quantitative terms and also setting new targets for the next year. For example, it has developed an extensive student-tutoring scheme with over 55 student tutors working in local schools.

This university established a programme of 'Aiming for a College Education' days and recorded both the number of these and the numbers of pupils participating. It has also established partnerships with 45 schools and FE colleges, and 25 university departments are involved. Each of these programmes is planned to be either maintained or expanded.

It has also examined its curriculum to ensure that it is consistent with the needs of a diverse student body. It developed new courses to provide top-up degrees for HND programmes offered by partner colleges, and has plans to develop new ones. It has also addressed the question of student support – partly through the use of information and communication technology to develop study support materials, but also it has established a number of pre-entry and on-course programmes, including summer schools, for students who may need additional support.

Staff development has not been neglected, with all new staff taking an initial Certificate in Teaching and Learning, which includes material on supporting a diverse student body.

The AOS concludes with a statement as to how the postcode-premium funding for widening participation has been spent and outlines the plans for its use in the next year.

This is a highly strategic approach to widening participation for a research-led university, in which all the strategic activities, including learning and teaching, link together.

A 'new university'

This post-1992 university sent an updated version of its initial 1999 statement on widening participation with its AOS in July 2000. In the 1999 strategic statement, the university had provided a good profile of its student body using its own data but had not had the opportunity to compare this with national benchmarks as shown in the university's performance indicators. In the initial statement, it had also provided some evidence from the Regional Development Agency and Government Office of areas of deprivation in its vicinity. In the revised statement, these data were updated and the university described the work it had carried out with the local schools, further education colleges and other organisations, including the Open College Network, to develop access and progression routes.

These data and the description of activities provided a good base for understanding the current position of the university, and the structures it had put in place for development.

The university has set itself a range of quantitative targets for 2000-01 for recruitment from disadvantaged and under-represented groups. These targets are global and include quite specific targets for particular subject areas. For example, the university aims to increase the numbers of female students on courses in the built environment where they are under-represented, and to increase the numbers of male students from its county who are under-represented in higher education.

The university then describes the range of activities it has been undertaking to widen participation and its future planned activities. These include a range of outreach activities as well as consideration of the curriculum and support mechanisms for students on courses, even though the university is in line with its benchmark for progression. The revised statement concludes with a description of the ways the premium funding has been used and plans for its use in the coming year.

This AOS showed particular good practice in its careful evaluation of the data on its existing student body and a careful review of current activities before discussing its plans for the future. All its activities were derived from an analysis of the current position and involved a coherent approach to enhancing performance.

A specialist college

This teaching-led college, which specialises in the creative arts, has as a key aim to offer a range of learning opportunities to young and mature adults from all backgrounds and cultures. Its access and widening participation strategy, on which it reports in the AOS, includes a commitment to enhancing provision for students with disabilities. Its outreach work includes provision of short courses as a way of attracting students into the creative arts. It also works with FE colleges to provide a curriculum with progression opportunities. It successfully delivered a summer school in partnership with a large neighbouring research-led university.

It includes in its AOS a summary of activities undertaken using the HEFCE premium funding for widening participation and plans for its future use. Particular attention is paid to developing retention action plans and to providing support for students with disabilities. Though these plans do not include detailed quantitative targets, the statement as a whole is characterised by its clear link to the college's strategic aims and by their comprehensive nature.

Learning and teaching

3. The purpose of this funding is to promote the development and implementation of institutional learning and teaching strategies. We requested a strategy from each institution in January 2000, together with details of activities which identified how HEFCE funds would be used. Strategies cover a three-year period (1999-2000 to 2001-02).

A research-intensive university

This multi-faculty redbrick university received more than £250,000 in 1999-2000 to implement the HEFCE-funded parts of the learning and teaching strategy.

The institution is concerned to maintain and enhance its learning and teaching quality and standards, while ensuring that it is more responsive to changes in the HE market, particularly the changing nature of its student body. The institution used its initial strategic statement on learning and teaching to set targets that were both generic to all learning and teaching, and more specific to the introduction of new, more diverse student groups. For example, targets relating to staff development and the maintenance of standards were set alongside efforts to develop a more student-centred learning approach, accredit prior learning and modularise undergraduate courses. There was therefore a direct link between the specific, structural targets set in its widening participation statement and those related to the provision of teaching. This integrated approach to learning and teaching and widening participation was carried through in the AOS.

The strategy also sets out a clear index of responsibilities for individuals and units, which has made it easier to monitor progress within the institution. The activities form, which accompanies the three-year strategy, clearly sets out intended outcomes and intermediate milestones for each activity to be funded. In particular, the activities form sets out anticipated progress in each academic year, making it easy to monitor through the AOS and to link back to the strategy.

A small specialist institution

This specialist institution received £30,000 in 1999-2000. Its strategic statement for learning and teaching focuses on four broad areas: the student experience; curriculum; learning resources; and staff development. The strategy makes specific links with its widening participation targets as it is actively seeking to increase the diversity of both its entry routes and its students. Its activities to widen participation include a very targeted programme of visits to schools to be followed up with intensive 'taster' visits. It is also undertaking a series of preliminary investigations to determine if its provision is equally accessible to all students. For example, it is concerned that its learning resources may not be readily accessible to disabled students, and it is seeking advice on whether it could do more to accommodate the needs of students with children. It is generally concerned to provide a supportive learning environment that recognises the diversity of students' needs.

The majority of the college's HE provision is non HEFCE-funded, but the comprehensive learning and teaching strategy brings both its HEFCE-funded and non-HEFCE funded activities together. The AOS follows the same format as the activities form, going through each proposed activity in sequence and reporting progress on each. The funding source for each activity is stated, which means that the AOS can satisfy the accountability needs of other funders as well as the HEFCE. Where an activity has been revised due to unanticipated circumstances (such as difficulty in recruiting), a plan is set out for getting the project back on track.

A teaching-led institution

This HE college has an excellent record of widening participation and already has a diversity of students enrolled. As such, it has fully integrated its widening participation objectives into the learning and teaching strategy, so that they complement one another. The institution is particularly concerned to promote increased ownership of the learning process by the student, and this is supported by detailed attention to staff development issues including a organisation-wide annual staff development plan based on identification and analysis of staff development needs.

The learning and teaching strategy is particularly focused on improving retention and completion rates, for example through an extended annual programme of diagnostic testing for individual needs which is followed up by targeted remedial provision and learning skills programmes. This supports the college's widening participation strategy, which aims to both recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds and to help such students to succeed.

Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community (HEROBC) fund

4. Institutions' proposed plans for HEROBC funding were expected to be consistent with their individual missions and strengths, taking account of their local or regional context. Each award was made (providing funding for a period of up to four years) at a level which took some account of the size of the institution as well as the quality and credibility of the planned outcomes.

A research-intensive institution

This university set as its aim 'enhancing responsiveness to the needs of business'. This was embodied in plans to establish a gateway to act as a broker linking the needs of business with the appropriate university centre of expertise, service or individual member of staff. The gateway focuses on four specific disciplines including engineering and social sciences, and is based in an academic department rather than an administrative centre.

The role of the gateway is to:

- disseminate a knowledge of University research into the public and industry domain
- create a knowledge network across all faculties, to market the services which exist within the University.
- act as a source of expertise regarding funding sources available to small and medium-sized companies.

The gateway will provide a key part of the basis for a sub-regional initiative, bringing together HE, large and emerging companies, and professional support groups to create favourable conditions for high technology development. These plans will require additional professional staff and will generate an Industrial Placement programme for students, supported by awareness and enterprise workshops.

Integral to the HEROBC-funded work is the setting of targets for activity and outcomes, combined with internal monitoring and evaluation by a steering group, whose members include representatives of employers supporting the scheme and business organisations.

A consortium approach

All of the higher education institutions in one region joined together in designing a programme focused on raising the skills of those staff directly involved in reach-out activities. The end result will be a regionally accredited programme of professional development, partnership, and support for such staff in every institution to maximise the impact of activities already being funded under HEROBC in the individual HEIs.

The consortium will produce a modular learning programme, materials for use by HEIs' own in-house trainers, and a regional support network consisting of employers, intermediary organisations and the Regional Development Agency. Objectives include:

- career development
- greater effectiveness in independently evaluated business linkages and customer service
- facilitating the placement and exchange of staff with businesses in the region

- engagement in and understanding of the regional economic strategy
- a fuller involvement of HE staff in business sector-based initiatives.

It is also planned to disseminate transferable aspects of the overall programme nationally.

The consortium set targets, which are largely numerical, relating to throughput of staff, the increase in business partnerships, accreditation of training, staff exchanges, and the establishment of newsgroups and network meetings. In addition the consortium has made arrangements for monitoring and evaluation using an independent evaluator reporting to a Development Group. Regional agencies and individual staff are contributing to quality assurance by providing evidence about the impact of the programme, as well as percentage coverage of the target groups.

Common strands of good practice

5. The common characteristics of good practice shown in the HEROBC examples include:

- planned activity tailored to the institution's mission and strength;
- demonstrable relevance to business and community needs;
- defined plans including budgets, timing and deliverables;
- arrangements for objective local monitoring.

6. Clear evidence is also given of the way in which the HEROBC-funded 'third strand' actions will become embedded in the institutional culture.