

# Council Briefing

The newsletter of the Higher Education Funding Council for England

## Responding to the Leitch challenge

**H**EFCE has agreed a major investment programme in response to the Leitch Report, which will enable universities and colleges to transform their employer engagement operations and boost their capacity to contribute to the development of a world class UK workforce.

The Council's approach is designed to build on the considerable achievements of higher education institutions in engaging with industry and business. The full implementation of the programme will depend on the resource allocations which will be made available following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

Professor David Eastwood, Chief Executive of HEFCE, said: 'The Leitch Report firmly positions the higher education sector as a key player in delivering the skills strategy, but we believe the contribution higher education can make is broader and more profound, embracing innovation, enterprise and skills. We want to ensure that we have a clear and integrated strategy within which the separate programme strands work together and support each other.'

The programme will enable the sector to deliver the employer-based and co-financed student places mentioned in the 2007 HEFCE grant letter from the

Secretary of State for Employment and Skills. This envisaged delivering at least 5,000 additional student places for such provision in the 2008-09 financial year, to be followed by year-on-year growth of at least 5,000 entrants in each of the following two years.

### Main projects

The programme comprises:

- inviting universities and colleges to bring forward proposals for stimulating and responding to the new market of employer co-funded workforce development. This will be the main mechanism for meeting the growth in employer co-funded places

- learning from the three regional Higher Level Skills pathfinder projects. A report is due to be published in January 2008 following an initial review
- six to eight sector skills development projects where higher level skills are critical in terms of economic impact
- further developing foundation degrees to meet the target of 100,000 students by the end of 2010
- developing a new funding method, which can be integrated into the main funding model. The intention is to provide detailed proposals to inform the 2009 spending review.

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*Sparking interest – six 'Beacons for Public Engagement' have been announced to promote and enhance public involvement in the work of universities and colleges. Public engagement activities include events such as Science Alive! when the University of Bristol brought science to a local shopping centre so that the public could get a flavour of its work. Chemist Dane Comerford is pictured explaining molecules at the event. See page 3 for full 'Beacons' story.*

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# Research Excellence Framework: assessment post-2008

**W**hile universities and colleges finalise their Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 submissions, due on 30 November 2007, HEFCE has been working on its successor – the Research Excellence Framework.

Although the outcomes of the 2008 RAE will substantially inform HEFCE's research funding until 2013-14, the Council has been developing a new framework for research assessment and funding, and is preparing a major national consultation.

## Consultation

The consultation will include proposals for new bibliometric indicators of research quality, and a range of other issues. It is informed by commissioned

studies and informal discussions held with a range of stakeholders throughout the summer.

## Report

The September HEFCE Board meeting discussed the work so far and a progress report was sent to the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

HEFCE is now preparing to launch the consultation. Consultation events for higher education institutions will take place in London, Manchester and Edinburgh.

Responses to the consultation will help to inform the development of the framework so that it is robust and workable across the sector.

For further information please contact Victoria Waite, Research Policy Officer, [v.waite@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:v.waite@hefce.ac.uk), 0117 931 7254.

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HEFCE's approach is being developed in partnership with the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), Universities UK, the CBI and other key representative bodies. Engaging employers in the higher education curriculum will also include working with the Sector Skills Councils.

The intention is to create a platform of capacity and capability building to meet the challenging Leitch targets for 2020. This involves increasing the proportion of people qualified to Level 4 and above from around 29 per cent now to more than 40 per cent.

Hugh Tollyfield will lead this programme within HEFCE, following the extension of his secondment from DIUS until October 2008.

*More information, including detail of projects funded to date, is available on the HEFCE web-site under Learning & teaching/Employer engagement.*

*See employer engagement story on the University of Derby, page 10.*

# Funding for students with equivalent or lower qualifications

The Council has launched a consultation on the implementation of the new government policy to withdraw funding for teaching students taking equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs) to ones that they have already achieved. HEFCE has also published statistical modelling showing the effects of this policy at institution, subject, mode and level, for the three academic years from 2008-09.

## Proposals

Proposals in the consultation include:

- exempting courses which are treated as exceptions in the government regulations covering fees and student support. This includes most medicine, teacher training, social work and nursing
- exempting students studying for foundation degrees, and students that HEFCE is co-funding with employers

- providing a separate stream of funding for strategically important and vulnerable subjects which will ensure that institutions' grant for these subjects will be maintained in real terms
- providing a £20 million supplement to the part-time allocation from 2009-10. This is to help preserve part-time opportunities for those entering higher education for the first time.

## Modelling

The modelling also shows the provision of a safety net to maintain each institution's grant at 2007-08 levels in cash terms. This will give institutions a chance to adjust to changing student numbers and levels of funding and to secure other sources of income.

John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, has told the Council that he would like the support for ELQ students to be reduced by £100 million a year by 2010-11. The modelling demonstrates

how this can be achieved. He has said the money will remain available to HEFCE for reallocation to support agreed priorities, but its reallocation will be decided later and has not been included in the modelling.

The Government has taken the decision to withdraw funding because it believes teaching such students 'is not ... as high a priority for public funding as support for students who are either entering higher education for the first time, or progressing to higher qualifications' (Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, John Denham's letter to HEFCE of 7 September 2007).

*The document, 'Withdrawal of funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs) Consultation on implementation' HEFCE 2007/27 is on the HEFCE web-site under Publications. The consultation closes on 7 December.*

# Six 'beacons' to ignite public engagement

Six 'Beacons for Public Engagement' in England, Wales and Scotland and a UK-wide co-ordinating centre will be at the forefront of a new £9.2 million initiative to open up higher education institutions to the public.

Funded by the UK higher education funding councils and Research Councils UK (RCUK), with support from the Wellcome Trust, the beacons represent the biggest initiative ever to support public engagement throughout the UK.

All the funders have come together to get the general public more involved in and engaged with the work of universities and colleges.

## Outward looking

Professor David Eastwood, HEFCE's Chief Executive said: 'Universities have never been more outward looking, or more aware of their wider responsibilities to engage across a range of issues. This initiative is timely as it will reinforce this increasing openness by recognising, rewarding and supporting public engagement across all higher education activities and building capacity to do so in all subjects.'



*One of the Newcastle beacon projects will focus on 'do-it-yourself' citizens juries in which a jury selected from community groups and the electoral roll picks a subject to discuss, helps choose the witnesses, and reaches a 'verdict' based on available evidence. Examples include healthcare for the elderly and the future of nanotechnology research. The jury's verdict is intended to influence policy-making. Pictured are Dr Tom Wakeford, director-designate of the beacon, and jury members.*

The beacons will be set up in Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, London, Cardiff and Edinburgh with the co-ordinating centre based in Bristol. They will take the lead to change the culture in universities by assisting staff and students to engage with the public.

## Collaboration

Each beacon will be a collaborative centre made up of several higher education institutions and partners such as further education colleges, museums, galleries, business, charities, TV and press, and public bodies.

RCUK's Champion for Science in Society, Professor Alan Thorpe, said: 'Much of the work carried out by higher education institutions has a

direct effect on people's lives, so it is important that they are able to access it and have their say. The beacons will do this by giving people the chance to get involved directly.'

Professor Kathy Sykes, Collier Chair in Public Engagement in Science and Engineering at the University of Bristol, on behalf of the national co-ordinating centre, said: 'The national co-ordinating centre will provide leadership and will work with the beacons, funders, policy-makers, and the whole higher education sector to make engaging with the public a key part of what it is to be an academic.'

Eighty-seven proposals were submitted to the bidding process. The beacons are a pilot initiative and will be reviewed to determine future policy.

# £3 million cash boost for south-east coast

Nine universities have joined forces to support the regeneration needs of economically deprived areas on the south-east coast in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire – a UK first in higher education.

The South East Coastal Communities project brings together the academic expertise of the universities to work with community groups to boost community well-being, employment opportunities, and economic and social development.

HEFCE's investment of £3 million has been matched by the universities and

their community partners to create a total three-year project fund of £6 million.

## Innovative

Professor David Eastwood, HEFCE's Chief Executive said: 'The South East Coastal Communities project will enable higher education institutions in the region to support the development and sustainability of voluntary, charitable and social enterprise organisations around the South East coastal rim. I am delighted that HEFCE has been able to support this innovative bid.'

The project will see universities from all three counties team up on a commitment to their local communities. Its work will include ensuring that community groups find the universities accessible, training older people to become peer researchers and developing the entrepreneurial skills of young people. The South East Coastal Communities Project will be run by: the universities of Brighton; Canterbury Christ Church; Chichester; Greenwich; Kent; Portsmouth; Southampton; Southampton Solent; and Sussex.

# ‘An exciting time for higher education’

An interview with David Young who retires as the chairman of the HEFCE Board at the end of the year

## How has the higher education landscape changed since you joined HEFCE in 2001?

My time on the HEFCE Board has coincided with a very exciting time for higher education. Around 15 institutions have been awarded university status and there have been some significant mergers.

The Higher Education Bill nearly brought down the Government with one of the largest revolts by MPs since 1945. Having come through this, the sector is now better funded and in better shape than it has been for a long time.

## What achievements have most pleased you during your term of office?

Despite the turmoil in relation to the Higher Education Bill, we provided a stable funding regime which helped institutions adapt to the smooth introduction of variable tuition fees.

There has also been steady progress on so-called ‘third stream’ engagement with business and the community. I think we are seeing a step change in terms of creating pathways into higher education through Lifelong Learning Networks.

We also played a significant part in setting up the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, and have made major strides towards ‘lighter touch’ regulation.



David Young joined HEFCE's Board in June 2001 and was appointed chairman in October the same year. In September 2004 he was reappointed for two years, and this was extended to December 2007. David was awarded a CBE for services to education in the Queen's birthday honours in June 2007.

## What do you think the greatest challenges have been?

Making progress on widening participation and raising the esteem given to excellent teaching towards parity with that accorded to research.

## What have you most enjoyed during your chairmanship?

My dealings with colleagues at HEFCE at every level and my visits to HEIs.

## What was the worst aspect of the job?

It has been a job I have enjoyed almost more than any other so this is a hard question. Perhaps it is having to live with uncertainty for lengthy periods whilst Government debates and decides policy direction; in the private sector the pace tends to be faster and you are more in control of your destiny.

## If you had a magic wand what would you wish for?

That everyone capable of benefiting from higher education did so.

## Has the sector's view of HEFCE changed?

Yes, I think it has. Six years ago it felt quite adversarial; whereas now I think there is a general recognition of where we can add value. I place great importance on the autonomy of institutions, but that said HEFCE can play a real part in encouraging creative responses to the challenges thrown up by today's world.

## How do you see the future for HEFCE?

I am wholly convinced of the value to all stakeholders of having a buffer body between Government and the sector – so I see a secure future for HEFCE and one where it will play an increasing role in setting policy direction.

## What are you going to do next?

Go on holiday to New Zealand! More seriously I have a small handful of other roles which will continue and, although I am not actively looking for something, I would probably find it attractive to take on another public sector position of some kind.

# Targeting outreach

**W**ith 10 per cent more women going on to higher education than men, and a lack of boys taking part in the outreach activity designed to get them interested in it, the higher education sector faces a significant challenge. Against this backdrop, Aimhigher East Midlands' 'Boys into HE' project is attempting to counteract this trend through a series of events to raise aspirations and attainment, coupled with widespread dissemination of good practice.

Such proactive approaches are at the heart of widening participation activity, although gender is not the most significant factor. 'Sex inequality

is clearly an issue for widening participation, yet it continues to be dwarfed by the issue of social class,' said John Selby, HEFCE's Director of Widening Participation.

## Social class

'The gap in participation rates between girls of different social classes is much greater than the gap between boys and girls and this remains the number one priority, as set out in HEFCE's targeting guidelines published in June (HEFCE 2007/12).

'With limited resources, widening participation practitioners have a difficult balancing act to ensure that events aimed at boys do not reinforce stereotypes, or discourage or detract

from the achievement of girls. We therefore must do nothing which might imply that we are seeking to reduce the participation of girls and women,' he said.

## Boost for boys

Practitioners will continue to develop their work to boost the participation of boys in disadvantaged communities and, building on the work in the East Midlands, HEFCE will be asking them to look closely at who participates.

*Further information is available at [www.aimhigher-eastmidlands.ac.uk](http://www.aimhigher-eastmidlands.ac.uk) under Boys into HE, and on the HEFCE web-site under Widening Participation. 'Higher education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners' (HEFCE 2007/12) is published on the HEFCE web-site under Publications.*

# Aimhigher awards: inspirational achievement

The first ever National Aimhigher Awards, celebrating the most effective and innovative ways of getting young people from under-represented communities into higher education, has acclaimed all the shortlisted students in the 'most inspirational student' category as winners.

The judges were greatly impressed with all of the students who have shown strong determination to overcome major obstacles such as disability, an upbringing in care, school exclusion and early involvement in crime and drugs.

John Selby, HEFCE's Director of Widening Participation said of the students: 'Their achievements with the support of Aimhigher were inspirational and, quite simply, brought home to me once again why widening participation in higher education is so important.'

The awards, supported by HEFCE, are set to become an annual event and are intended to highlight achievements and showcase the best work in the Aimhigher programme nationally.



*Five of the student winners (L-R) – Ian Bennett, Adam Brett, Phillip Leader, Melissa Blair Steenson and Richard Amos with compère Phil Beadle.*

The other award winners were:

- Aimhigher partnership of the year – Lancashire
- Most innovative Aimhigher practice – Nottinghamshire for its support of vocational progression
- Aimhigher school/college of the year – Brakenhale School, Bracknell for its maths residential weekends
- Most effective communications – West Yorkshire for the Wakefield

Aimhigher parent guide to further and higher education

- Outstanding individual contribution – Karyn Buck of Aimhigher Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire

*Case studies of the winning and shortlisted award entries can now be downloaded from the Aimhigher practitioner web-site at [www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner).*

# LGM Fund packs a punch

**A** further £10 million has been allocated to HEFCE's Leadership, Governance and Management (LGM) Fund to enable it to continue its work to 2010.

Since 2004 HEFCE has used its LGM Fund to invest in building the sector's capacity and capability to meet the challenges facing universities and colleges.

## Pump-priming

Using these 'pump-priming' funds, HEFCE has supported projects which have stimulated innovation, better practice and practical improvements in areas such as governance, estates, and managing relationships with staff, students and trade unions (see case studies below).

It also supports newer areas such as shared services and sustainable development.

## Evaluation

A recent independent evaluation of the LGM Fund found that it 'punched above its weight' in terms of its contribution to improving LGM practice in English higher education.

## Conference

In this next phase of the LGM Fund, HEFCE will work in partnership with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education to manage the fund. Outputs from LGM Fund projects will continue to inform the Leadership Foundation's work and there will be a joint LGM Fund/Leadership Foundation conference on 24 January 2008 to disseminate them. Conference details will appear on the HEFCE web-site shortly.

Guidelines on how to apply for funding and details of projects funded so far are on the HEFCE web-site under Leadership, governance & management/LGM Fund.

*The evaluation report is available on the web-site under Publications.*

# Derby tackles skills gap

University of Derby Corporate is poised to open for business in a unique project to support employers in tackling the national 'skills gap'.

Backed by a £12 million investment package from HEFCE, the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership and the University of Derby itself, University of Derby Corporate will be totally dedicated to working with employers, in a new business and enterprise centre to be built on campus.

## Aims

Within five years University of Derby Corporate aims to:

- help 3,000 employees undertake accredited training to learn new, higher-level skills
- establish links with more than 300 employers, to show how higher education can help their business and staff's development
- support the creation of 70 new businesses.

HEFCE Chief Executive, Professor David Eastwood, said: 'This is a major investment for businesses in Derby and the surrounding area. Our contribution of almost £5 million, alongside those from the university and the East Midlands Development Agency, demonstrates HEFCE's investment programme in action.'

## LGM: Championing women medics

The 'Women in Academic Medicine' project aims to improve the career progression of female medical academics. Led by Dr Anita Holdcroft at Imperial College, the project looked to make an impact on medical schools where gender equality has not yet been established. It identified barriers to progression and solutions such as good practice examples and training. Dr Holdcroft said: 'We hope the recommendations will be taken up across the sector, by government and individuals, and make a real difference for women working in the medical profession today.'



## LGM: Tackling campus emergencies

Bernadette Duncan at City University is working on a good practice guide for managing major incidents and emergencies on campus in an LGM Fund project being run on behalf of the Association of University Chief Security Officers (AUSCO). This work goes hand-in-hand with another AUSCO LGM Fund project to train staff at higher education institutions across London and later nationally, to manage emergencies such as flood and consequences of terrorist attack. 'City University is no stranger to such incidents, having suffered a very damaging fire in 2001 (pictured). Our first training course is in November and we hope to roll it out nationwide next year,' said Mrs Duncan.

# Three-quarters of PhD students qualify within 10 years

As part of a national approach to assuring the quality of supervision of postgraduate students, HEFCE has published two reports on the time it takes for HEFCE-funded postgraduate research students to qualify.

## Research degree completion rates

'Research degree qualification rates: 1999-2000 – 2005-06' (HEFCE 2007/29) gives qualification rates for publicly funded research degree students in England for each higher education institution. This is the first annual publication of this data for individual institutions.

The rate of completion varies considerably between institutions, ranging from 40 per cent to 90 per cent completion after seven years.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education will use this information as part of its evidence in its institutional reviews.

## Sector-wide PhD completion rates

'PhD research degrees: Entry and completion' (HEFCE 2007/28) examines the rates of completion of PhD research degrees for the higher education sector as a whole.

The report shows that 57 per cent of students who started a full-time PhD programme in 1996-97 completed their PhD within five years, rising to 72 per cent after seven years and 76 per cent after 10 years. Of part-time starters, almost half completed within 10 years (see graph below).

PhD completion rates after seven years for full-time students increased from 72 per cent for those who began their studies in 1996-97, to 75 per cent for those who began in 1999-2000.

The report also provides information on ethnicity and disability. It indicates that Asian and black students on full-time PhD programmes have a lower completion rate than their white counterparts. For example, 67 per cent of black students completed their PhD within 10 years, compared to 76 per cent of white students.

## Better regulation progress recognised

Progress made by HEFCE in reducing the burden of accountability on universities and colleges has been recognised by the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG).

In his report to Bill Rammell MP, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Steve Bundred, Chair of HERRG says that HEFCE has been working towards the better regulation of higher education for a number of years.

## Streamlined

He says that HEFCE has streamlined special funding, and adopted a more targeted programme of shorter audit visits. HEFCE is also working with other key regulatory bodies in the sector to secure better regulation.

Steve Bundred reports that 22 organisations have signed up to the higher education concordat on quality assurance arrangements and data collection and that HERRG is convinced that they are working well together.

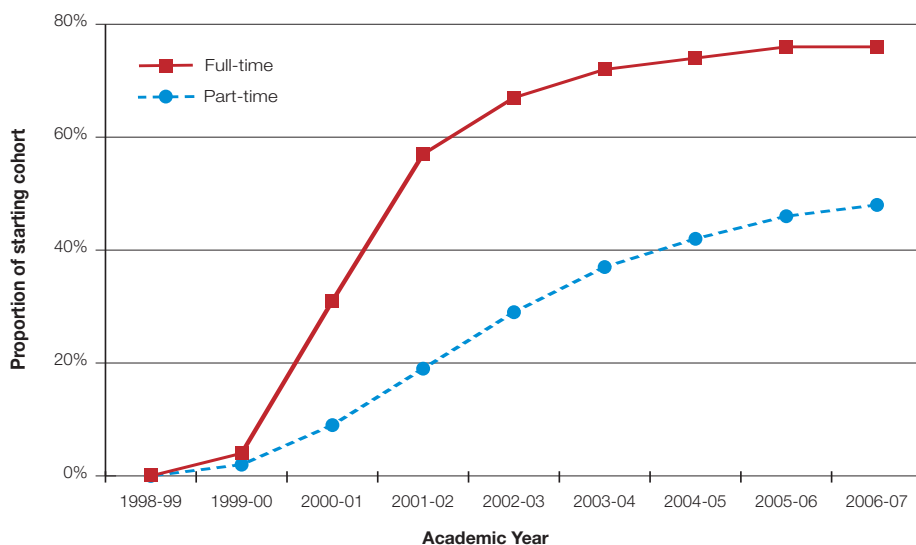
Under the new arrangements, HEFCE makes maximum use of data from HESA and is developing an approach to the formula funding of teaching based on better regulation principles. It is also working closely with UniversitiesUK and GuildHE to improve arrangements for assuring the quality of teaching and the standards in higher education institutions (the quality assurance framework). Summing up Steve Bundred said that HEFCE's 'commitment to the concordat is therefore not in doubt'.

The HERRG report says more needs to be done. Significant issues relate to clarifying the roles of professional bodies and the Sector Skills Councils in their interaction with statutory regulators and each other.

It also states that the sector itself must play a full part in creating the conditions that will enable regulators to place greater reliance on institutions' own structures and processes.

*The HERRG report is available at: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/improvingregulation](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/improvingregulation)*

## Time PhD students take to complete



*The chart shows the proportion of the starting cohort that completes a PhD before 1 August of each academic year.*

# Forging links abroad

**U**niversities in the East and North East of England and Hiroshima University and Kitakyushu University in Japan have collaborated to share policy and practice on higher education's contribution to regional development.

The exchange aimed to establish relationships between the universities and business and community organisations in both countries.

The event, organised and managed by the British Council in Japan and HEFCE, looked at how institutions are at the heart of the regeneration of their

communities, and the different ways that institutions in each country work in their respective regions. It also provided good networking opportunities for the universities to set up student exchanges and to work together, sharing learning on economic regeneration, working with the community, and shared issues such as an ageing population.

The event concluded with a National Policy Forum held in Tokyo, with the delegates from each region presenting their findings. This was attended by HEFCE Chief Executive Professor David Eastwood (pictured), as well as representatives from Japanese institutions and government.



*Transcripts of the forum are available on request from the British Council in Japan. Contact: Lesley.Hayman@britishcouncil.or.jp*

# Enhancing UK HE's global opportunities

The UK Higher Education International Unit has been established at UniversitiesUK to co-ordinate, promote and undertake activities designed to support UK higher education institutions across the globe.

With funding from the four funding councils, GuildHE and UniversitiesUK, the International Unit will:

- publish news on trends and opportunities for UK universities and colleges
- provide an online document library with country specific intelligence
- hold seminars and conferences to disseminate research findings
- commission strategic research on issues such as international competition for doctoral research students and international research collaboration.

Some of this international work was previously undertaken in-house at HEFCE but the formation of the new

unit will allow the Council to focus on the international intelligence it needs to inform its funding policy developments.

*See [www.international.ac.uk](http://www.international.ac.uk) for more information on the work of the International Unit.*

*For information on HEFCE's specific international relations work contact Cliff Hancock, International Relationships Manager, [c.hancock@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:c.hancock@hefce.ac.uk).*

## Clinical awards round 3

The third round of the Clinical Senior Lectureship Awards is now open for nominations. These awards are supported by the UK Clinical Research Collaboration and designed to build clinical academic careers in medicine and dentistry through joint funding by HEFCE and NHS Trusts. Up to 40 posts may be funded in this round at a cost of around £10 million.

In a similar pattern to last year, the submission deadline is in February 2008. Final decisions on awards will be made by June 2008.

*Further details are on the HEFCE web-site under Research.*

## hefce Council Briefing

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