

Annex A Details of the grant programme

Background

1. For some time, higher education institutions have developed links with schools and colleges in their own right or, from 2001 onward, through government programmes such as Excellence Challenge², Partnerships for Progression³ and Aimhigher⁴. The extensive range, quality and quantity of work already undertaken between schools, colleges and higher education (HE) indicates that there is considerable understanding by higher education institutions (HEIs) of the conditions necessary to make such arrangements successful. This new grant will enable institutions to undertake research into effective models for school/college-HE links and, in some cases, develop these further. HEFCE will then summarise and disseminate this research to the sector and other stakeholders.

2. Many HEIs have links with colleges which are not related to the provision of HE: for example, support for curriculum development in 14-19 diploma areas or A-level subject enrichment activity. In addition, colleges with HE provision also develop school-HE links. However, the focus of this grant is principally on links which exist between schools and HEIs. Further education colleges that are directly funded by HEFCE are eligible to apply for this grant as part of a consortium arrangement with a lead HEI.

3. The annual grant letter from the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills to HEFCE for the 2008-09 academic year showed the continued interest by government in school/college-HE links:

‘I particularly want to build on the successes of the many links between universities, schools and colleges, which have been inspired by Aimhigher and institutions’ own outreach activities. Both I and Ed Balls at DCSF are convinced that there is much more that universities can do to help shape the vision, strategies and ethos underpinning educational excellence in our schools and colleges. In turn that will mean that universities have a direct hand in securing a larger and better-prepared pool of talent able to compete for their places. We want to see many more deep and permanent partnerships forging strong cultural links between schools and universities. I want the funding council to play a full part in encouraging and supporting institutions to develop in this way, taking a lead from the academies, trust schools and higher education prospectus⁵

² Further information on Excellence Challenge can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk under Research areas/Excellence in Cities/Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge.

³ Further information on Partnerships for Progression can be found in [HEFCE 2002/49](#). All HEFCE publications can be read on the Council’s web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, under Publications.

⁴ Further information on Aimhigher can be found at www.hefce.ac.uk under Widening participation/Aimhigher.

⁵ ‘Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: prospectus’ (DCSF/DIUS 2007) is available from www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/academies under Publications and Documents.

published by DIUS and DCSF last year. Your plans will also need to take account of the recommendations in the spring from the National Council for Educational Excellence about strengthening HE-school links.'

4. The National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) was established in June 2007 to 'act as a sounding board about strategy and measures to deliver a world-class education system, and to mobilise key groups within society to support education' (DCSF-00803-2008). The NCEE brought together influential people from business, HE, early years, the school and college sectors and other stakeholders. In October 2008, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) jointly published 'National Council for Educational Excellence: recommendations'⁶. The higher education section of the NCEE recommendations can be summarised as follows:
 - a. Improvements are required in HE-related information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision in schools and colleges so that learners are aware of and can apply to the full range of HE provision on offer. HE admissions policies should be published and accessible to applicants.
 - b. Schools and HEIs should provide every learner with an opportunity to visit a HE campus during the primary or early secondary phases.
 - c. HEI links with schools and colleges should support the development of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and modern foreign languages.
 - d. HEIs should support schools in their improvement strategies as well as providing support for academies.
 - e. HEIs should produce comprehensive strategies for their widening participation work showing the balance between the investment in fair access and widening participation.
5. As part of its ongoing deliberations, the NCEE considered a report from Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter. This report provided an overview of the way in which HEIs currently engage with schools and, although not a systematic audit of HEI engagement, it provided a very clear picture of current work.
6. Professor Smith identified three key messages from the responses that he received:
 - a. The HE sector is involved in numerous initiatives and partnerships working with schools and colleges, raising aspiration and attainment, talent spotting and nurturing potential, giving truly national coverage.
 - b. Projects work best when relationships are developed over time, are strategic and support the missions of universities, colleges and schools involved in a targeted way.

⁶ 'National Council for Educational Excellence: recommendations' ([DCSF-00803-2008](#)) is available from the DCSF website.

c. There are challenges to be faced, particularly around building sustainable and long-term relationships, not just short-term funded projects. The work must meet the needs of the HEIs and schools, recognising the infrastructural issues that affect their capacity to engage. These must be overcome if the best results are to be achieved and good practice shared across universities and schools.

Outcome of the school/college-HE grant programme

7. This research, development and evaluation grant programme will provide us with research reports on effective models of school-HE links which we will summarise and publish by October 2009.

8. We will provide opportunities for networking, dissemination events and the publication of a summary of research findings. We expect HEIs to select various features or elements in the models provided of school-HE links and apply these to their own institutional practice.

9. We expect an increase in the number and diversity of school-HE links to be a feature of the strategic assessments to be developed by institutions.

Who is eligible to apply for the grant?

10. All HEIs funded by HEFCE are eligible to apply. Further education colleges that are directly funded by HEFCE are eligible to apply as part of a consortium arrangement with a lead HEI.

The application process

11. Applications for funding should be made using the electronic version of the form at [Annex B](#), which can be downloaded from the [HEFCE web-site](#) alongside this document. The deadline for applications is **Friday 27 February 2009**.

12. All applications will be considered by a panel comprising staff from HEFCE policy and institutional teams as well as external stakeholders with school, college and HE backgrounds.

13. We would expect successful grant applications to research areas of school-HE links where good practice may exist but is not widely recognised or shared, and to put forward proposals to describe, evaluate and possibly further develop that good practice. The extension of already well-adopted good practice to different and/or more challenging settings might also be supported, especially where this would lead to a better return on investment.

14. We are looking for 'whole institution' models of school-HE links with some elements being radically different or distinct from more traditional practice but which have been tested for their effectiveness. The research should produce learning that can be shared with the sector and based on sound, transferable methodology.

15. The following guidelines should be followed when preparing projects:

a. The NCEE recommendations and the three key elements of school-HE links suggested by HEFCE should be incorporated as follows:

- i. Shared governance and strategic planning arrangements with school-HE links should feature both in school improvement and HEI corporate plans.
 - ii. Co-operation on curriculum development with schools and HE providers identifying areas where joint working and exchanges could provide advantages for both.
 - iii. Support for learners including enhanced arrangements for IAG, particularly at key transition points in the 13-19 age phase, so that the full range of HE destinations are considered by learners.
 - b. There should be a description of the key elements, critical success factors or approaches used to provide sustainable and cost-effective provision that deepens and strengthens structural links across educational sectors.
 - c. There should be measurable impact on: learner attainment and progression; school and HE curricula; school improvement; and the corporate objectives of HE providers.
 - d. There should be evidence of commitment from institutions, schools, colleges, local authorities and other stakeholders.
 - e. There should be a description of the way in which evaluation can be used in a formative way to develop ongoing and longer-term practice.
 - f. Examples of the indicators of success and mutual benefit should be provided which help us to research ways in which the effectiveness of school/college-HEI relationships might be measured.
16. Applications must include:
 - a. The project title with the focus or key intentions of the proposal.
 - b. An outline of the way in which practice in school-HE links is to be researched, developed and evaluated.
 - c. A short summary of how this project will benefit the higher and/or other educational sectors.
 - d. A short description of how the project will be managed.
 - e. An indicative estimate of the required budget and how the money will be spent.
17. This information is requested on the template at Annex B. It will allow us to assess the possible impact of the project and the likelihood of effective dissemination.
18. Up to 10 projects will each receive a grant between £40,000 and £60,000.
19. Following the completion of the research, we will subsequently provide funding for three of the 10 projects to develop practice further over two years. Each project will receive an additional £60,000 to £80,000.

20. Please note that this invitation for proposals is for the first phase of the research only. We expect to receive proposals by **Friday 27 February 2009** and the projects to begin by 1 April 2009.

21. Institutions in receipt of the grant will be expected to produce a research report by 28 August 2009.

Transparency

22. A funded project will be expected to complete the work described in its proposal unless the scope of the original project has had to be changed and the proponents have informed us of this change. If HEFCE funding is not being used appropriately, or project progress is unsatisfactory, we reserve the right to suspend funding and may reclaim any overpayment. HEIs should contact the HEFCE widening participation team at an early stage for support and guidance if they have concerns about progress.

Accountability arrangements

23. We may ask funded projects to provide brief, periodic progress reports, to advise us if the project is failing in any significant respect, and to tell us when the work is complete. We will also monitor the project's progress against agreed targets and operational plans.

24. HEFCE will support work to maximise the coherence of learning across the group of funded institutions – for example, through developing conceptual frameworks to present findings in a consistent way and/or for additional and complementary evaluation activities at a more macro level. We will also actively support the dissemination of learning from the initiative and look for opportunities to showcase funded projects at appropriate national events.

25. We will ensure that accountability remains proportionate to the funding provided, and we will not provide funds in advance of need. As with all HEFCE funding, we have the right to audit the use of these funds, but propose to do so on a sample basis only. Institutions that receive funding under this initiative will take on relevant accountability responsibilities. This includes producing a report at the end of the project.

26. Institutions will be responsible for the appropriate use of project funds via their internal audit teams. In exceptional circumstances we will ask to see the project expenditure records for the project held by the institution.

27. Initial ideas for applications can be developed in discussion with HEFCE's widening participation policy team (e-mail wp@hefce.ac.uk), or with a HEFCE regional consultant (contact details for regional teams are on the HEFCE web-site under About us/Contact us). We will try to provide feedback quickly, so that HEIs do not invest significant resources in a project that is not likely to succeed. On the other hand, HEIs considering promising but under-developed proposals will be given further advice about how their proposed project might be improved. We will provide constructive, developmental feedback on unsuccessful proposals on request.

Timetable

28. The timetable for the programme will be as follows:

27 February 2009	Initial proposals received using the electronic version of the template at Annex B.
20 March 2009	HEI(s) submitting successful proposals notified. Requests for additional information and detailed operational plan made by HEFCE. Further information and detailed operational plan submitted to HEFCE.
1 April 2009	Funding for projects begins.
28 August 2009	Final report submitted.
October 2009	HEFCE publishes a document summarising research in school-HE links.