

## Widening participation policy context

### The HEFCE's widening participation policy

1. Since our establishment we have been committed to widening participation in higher education. The aim of our policy has been to help institutions increase the numbers of under-represented groups being recruited, retained and successfully progressed through a course of higher education study. We have supported them by providing additional funding both through the mainstream formula grant, and via special initiatives. We have encouraged higher education institutions (HEIs) to increase and enhance their widening participation activities, recognising that the diversity of mission and ethos within institutions will affect the nature of the activities undertaken. We have also encouraged them to undertake this activity in collaboration with other HEIs, further education colleges (FECs) and key stakeholders, and to build partnerships to facilitate the successful delivery of widening participation strategies.

2. We have introduced a number of measures to seek to widen participation in higher education. In determining these measures we worked from a set of principles which were:

- access to achievement
- increased collaboration
- recognising diversity
- targeting certain groups.

3. Our objectives in relation to institutions were to:

- reward proven success
- recognise additional costs
- increase representation of particular disadvantaged groups
- build partnerships
- promote and disseminate good practice
- support activity designed to retain students
- encourage collaboration.

4. As we stated in HEFCE 00/50 'Funding for widening participation: new proposals 2000-01 to 2003-04', there are three dimensions to our concern with access and widening participation: to widen participation in higher education by under-represented groups to raise the aspirations of all to attend the institution best able to match their abilities, interests and needs to ensure that all students have the best chance of succeeding in their studies.

5. The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) in July 1997 (the Dearing Committee), and the Kennedy Report, 'Learning Works' (1997) both emphasised the importance of institutional strategies for widening participation. In the light of their recommendations we consulted the sector on the corporate planning cycle (HEFCE 98/13) and proposals that funding should be linked to institutions' strategies for widening participation (HEFCE 99/39). As a result of these consultations, in HEFCE 99/33 'Widening participation in higher education' we asked institutions to submit initial strategic plans for widening participation. The plans were submitted in October 1999 and were subsequently analysed by our national co-ordination team for widening participation, Action

on Access, in August 2000. The results of that analysis are summarised in Annex B; the full report is on the HEFCE web-site with this document under 'Publications'.

6. We provide the following funding in relation to widening participation.

#### Core funding

7. Funding for teaching and research is allocated to institutions via a funding model (see HEFCE 01/14 for further information). There are four additional funding streams for widening participation that feed into the teaching funding:

- widening participation formula funding (postcode premium)
- aspiration funding
- disability funding
- additional student numbers.

#### Widening participation formula funding (postcode premium)

8. Since 1999 the funding allocation for teaching has included a premium for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to recognise that HEIs are likely to incur additional costs in supporting such students. The premium is assessed on a geodemographic basis. The allocation is calculated by measuring the proportion of full-time and part-time students under 25 in each HEI from certain socio-economic groups, defined by postcode areas. (Listings of the indicative allocations for 2001-02 can be found in HEFCE 01/12.) The allocation can be used to support students of all types including part-time and postgraduate.

#### Aspiration funding

9. The aspiration funding is a new stream which consists of £6 million a year, for three years, which will be allocated to institutions with less than 80 per cent of students from state schools and further education colleges. The funding will support aspiration raising activities amongst state educated pupils, primarily in Excellence in Cities areas, to encourage them to attend the institution from which they will derive the maximum benefit. Further information on the funding can be found in HEFCE 01/29.

#### Disability funding

10. In 2000-01 we also introduced mainstream disability funding, in order to recognise the additional costs associated with the recruitment and retention of students with disabilities. (For further information see circular letter 07/00, and HEFCE 99/04 which refers to a report on baseline provision.) For further information on this funding contact Fiona Reid, tel 0117 931 7115, or e-mail [f.reid@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:f.reid@hefce.ac.uk)

#### Additional student numbers (ASNs)

11. Each year in the autumn we ask HEIs and FECs if they wish to bid for additional funded student numbers against certain criteria, including widening access. Overall in 2000-01, 87 per cent of the allocations were for bids that addressed one or more of the widening access priorities, and 52 per cent of these went to institutions that had demonstrated high quality higher education provision.

## Project funding

### Regional projects

12. In 1998-99 we asked HEIs to bid for project funding to develop regional partnerships with other organisations that would improve their widening participation activities. In 1999-2000 the work from the first year was built upon and developed further. HEIs were asked to bid for funds to run projects that would build partnerships and disseminate and embed good practice in relation to widening participation. At the same time a joint programme was launched with the then Further Education Funding Council (now the Learning and Skills Council – LSC). It focused on the progression from further to higher education and linked with the work of Lifelong Learning Partnerships. These joint projects were originally scheduled to end in December 2002 but the LSC has recently agreed a further year of funding. Projects are monitored by Regional Advisory Networks (RANs) that report to a National Advisory Panel, supported by Action on Access.

### Disability projects

13. From 1996 to 1998-99, with the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, we funded a special initiative to 'encourage institutions to develop high quality provision for students with disabilities' in order to increase participation. To build on the success of the third year of this initiative, we provided a further three years of funding. In HEFCE 99/08 we invited HEIs to bid under three strands:

- establishing baseline provision in HEIs with little or no current provision
- promoting and transferring good practice
- developing collaborative opportunities.
- These projects are supported by the National Disability Team. The original initiative was evaluated and the report was published as HEFCE 00/46.

### Summer Schools

14. In November 1999 HEFCE introduced the Millennium Summer School scheme as part of the Government's wider 'Excellence in Cities' programme. The schools are intended to raise the aspirations of 'gifted and talented' 16-17 year olds in inner city schools. A total of £4 million was allocated and the HEIs involved were those in Excellence in Cities areas, and those with high entry requirements. The National Foundation for Educational Research conducted an evaluation of the first year of the scheme which has been published as HEFCE 01/04. The scheme has now been extended: the 2001-02 programme is under way and initial planning has started for the 2002-03 programme.

## Policy development

15. Recent government policy has encouraged HEIs to be more inclusive in their recruitment to full-time degree and diploma courses from disadvantaged communities in the inner cities. This is a strategy designed to encourage greater representation from low socio-economic groups and thus to ensure a more even social class mix within higher education. However, there are other significant groups that need to be considered strategically, such as minority ethnic groups and those in rural areas. Therefore an institution's widening participation strategy should ideally encompass all its plans

for widening participation, with reference to existing provision and future aspirations and endeavours. Institutions are encouraged to include details in their strategy of how they will improve provision for students with disabilities, in particular using their recurrent funding earmarked for this purpose.

16. In September 2000 the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, launched the 'Excellence Challenge' programme, which will provide additional funds to widen the participation of young people in higher education. In HEFCE 00/50 we discussed the implications of this programme in the context of our widening participation strategy, and consulted the sector on the use of the additional funding which will be allocated directly to HEIs via the widening participation formula funding and the aspiration premium. In HEFCE 01/29 we reported back to the sector on the outcome of the consultation exercise, and the funding decisions taken by the HEFCE Board, and asked institutions to submit revised widening participation strategies.

17. This guide complements HEFCE 01/29 by providing examples of good practice from the sector on the nature, content and uses of widening participation strategies. It is designed to support HEIs in their development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies.

18. Table 1 summarises the HEFCE funding currently available. Not all the funding is aimed specifically at disadvantaged or under-represented students, for example there are premiums for mature and part-time students, but it shows the range of funding that HEIs can draw on for widening participation. Additional student numbers, and funded places for the University for Industry (Ufi), are not included in this table because the funds awarded will vary depending on the price groups, modes and levels of the students.

**Table 1 HEFCE funding to support widening participation**

<b>Funding strand</b>	<b>2000-01 (£)</b>	<b>2001-02 (£)</b>	<b>2002-03 (£)</b>	<b>2003-04 (£)</b>
<b>Core funding</b>				
Postcode premium	25 M	28 M	31 M	31M
Mature and part-time premium	37.5 M	37.5 M*	37.5 M*	37.5 M*
Funding supplement by reference to percentage of state educated students (aspiration premium)	0	6 M	6 M	6 M
Disability funding	7 M	8 M	†	†
<b>Project funding</b>				
Summer Schools	4 M	4 M**	4 M**	4 M**
Partnership projects	7.5 M	7.5 M	7.5 M***	7.5 M***
Foundation degrees	5.2 M	†	†	†
<b>Student support</b>				
Total individual student financial support (figure in brackets gives maximum funding for Opportunity Bursaries only)	86 M	92 M* (6 M)	97 M* (11 M)	103 M* (17 M)
<b>Total</b>	<b>172.2 M</b>	<b>183 M</b>	<b>183 M</b>	<b>189 M</b>

\* Funds allocated in 2000-01. Student numbers and funding allocations (except for Opportunity Bursaries) in succeeding years may fluctuate and therefore alter totals.

\*\* Current allocation by the DfEE; this may be adjusted year on year.

\*\*\* Current partnership projects are due to end in 2001-02. Decisions about the future of this special initiative will be informed by the evaluation of our widening participation strategy, due to be concluded in May 2002.

† The funding allocation for these streams have not yet been finalised.

## **The DfEE's Excellence Challenge**

19. In 1997 the Government launched initiatives to target school children in deprived urban areas. This included the setting up of Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas and Education Action Zones (EAZs). These are geographical areas where partnerships have been established to improve the standards of education for school children.

20. The 'Excellence Challenge' builds on the work already under way in EiC areas and is part of the wider strategy of modernising government and joined-up thinking. It is designed to improve access to HE for bright young students from poorer backgrounds while maintaining entry standards. A key purpose is to improve links between schools, colleges and universities so that they can work together more effectively to improve access to higher education. The Government has made £150 million available over a three year period to fund this initiative.

21. Excellence Challenge is a pilot scheme, initially focused on these urban areas, but it could be rolled out to other areas of the country.

### Excellence in Cities

22. The EiC initiative sets out a three year programme to improve the education of city children. Measures will build on existing policies to raise standards by focusing on the needs of individual pupils. The aim is to drive up standards in schools in major cities to match the standards of excellence found in the best schools.

23. There are seven main policy strands:

- City Learning Centres
- specialist schools
- gifted and talented children
- beacon schools
- learning mentors
- Learning Support Units
- EAZs – setting up 50 new small EAZs within EiC partnerships.

24. More information about individual policy strands and the activities in the EiC areas can be found at [www.dfes.gov.uk/excellence](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/excellence), including the annual report for 1999-2000.

25. The designation of urban areas as EiC areas is happening in three phases. At the moment only phase 1 and 2 EiC areas and all the EAZs are involved in the Excellence Challenge. A list of the EiC areas and EAZs can be found in HEFCE 00/50 and HEFCE 01/15; some EiC areas contain EAZs and some do not.

### Education Action Zones

26. EAZs take as a starting point two principles:

- more needs to be done in our most deprived urban and rural areas to ensure all pupils have the chance to succeed

- it is essential that the capacity for change and innovation are built into the school system.

They are therefore about both improvement and embedding change in particular areas; and about discovering models of improvement which can be shared with the rest of the education system.

27. Zones are set up in response to applications from groups of around 15-25 schools and their partners. Applicants set out how they will raise standards, and set themselves targets for improvement. Their plans must be for new activities: it cannot be more of the same. Each zone receives up to £1 million each year: £500,000 from the DfEE as a baseline and up to £250,000 more in return for funds raised from private partners. Each zone is run by an Action Forum, and managed by a project director, a kind of 'chief executive' for the zone.

28. To help them innovate, zones have certain legislative freedoms: governing bodies can set new non-standard contracts for teachers' pay and conditions, and can cede powers to the forum. They can take advantage of existing flexibility in the curriculum, and of the legislation which allows schools to adopt alternatives to it if they can show this will raise standards.

29. There are currently 99 EAZs and, with the introduction of up to 82 more 'small' EAZs within Excellence in Cities areas; some 10 per cent of schools in England will be in an EAZ by September 2001. Small EAZs have some different arrangements to the larger ones. They normally consist of up to eight schools, including one secondary, and can receive up to £350,000 a year: £250,000 from the DfEE as a baseline and up to £50,000 more in return for funds raised from private partners.

#### Strands of Excellence Challenge

30. There are four strands of activity to the Excellence Challenge itself:

- **strand 1** – brings universities and other HEIs and FECs into the EiC initiative to provide additional support for young people who have the ability to enter HE
- **strand 2** – increases funding to HEIs to reach out to more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will enable them to recruit more admissions staff, send ambassadors to schools and colleges, and run more open days and summer schools for young people and their teachers
- **strand 3** – provides clearer and better information about the route to HE for young people, with a particular focus on reaching families and communities who do not have a tradition of entering HE, raising expectations of students and teachers alike
- **strand 4** – pilots new forms of financial help for bright young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Specifically this includes the Opportunity Bursaries that will be administered through the HEFCE and by HEIs, along with the other student support funds.

31. A full version of the Excellence Challenge document is in Annex D of HEFCE 00/50. HEIs will mainly be concerned with strands 1, 2 and 4. The activity for strand 3 will involve a national campaign undertaken by the Government.

32. In HEFCE 01/29 we announced the funding decisions for widening participation for 2001-02 to 2003-04. In terms of HEIs' widening participation strategies we want to encourage institutions to think about how they can widen and deepen existing initiatives, undertake the activities outlined in strand 1 and 2 of the Excellence Challenge, and make links with the EiC and EAZ areas where appropriate.

We recognise that diversity of mission and geographical location will have a significant impact on the ability of individual HEIs to respond to the Excellence Challenge initiative.

33. The initiative encourages HEIs to look beyond their regions and to think about making links with other parts of the country. However, this will be easier for some institutions than others. For example HEIs that recruit nationally, such as specialist institutions, will find it easier to establish distant EiC links. HEIs in rural areas who are not close to EiC areas, for example in the South-West or North-West, will find it harder to develop long-distance relationships. In cities where there are several HEIs, different issues will dictate the individual approach. Thus Excellence Challenge could have an important impact on existing collaborative and competitive relationships.

34. In line with existing policy, we would like to encourage institutions to work within existing collaborations where possible, although it may be that addressing the Excellence Challenge agenda will affect the current organisation of such collaborations. For example, if within an existing collaboration one partner is working in an EiC area but others are not, it might be appropriate to reassess the arrangement.

35. All the activities that relate to strand 1 and 2 will be funded by an increase in the widening participation formula (postcode) funding; this has risen by £4 million in 2001-02, to £28 million in total. HEIs were notified about their indicative widening participation formula funding for 2001-02 in the March grant letter, with final allocations to come in the July grant letter.

36. The aspiration premium will be given to institutions with less than 80 per cent of entrants from state schools. In order to establish eligibility for funding we are collecting data from the HEIs we think could be eligible. We will then notify the relevant HEIs of their allocations, and the funding will flow from August 2001.

37. As the work of strand 3 is being led by the Government, there is no money specifically for improving communications with potential students. However, it might be that HEIs will want to time their own publicity efforts with the national advertising campaign by the DfEE. HEIs can use their postcode premium to support communications activity if they wish.

38. On strand 4 the situation is slightly different as this relates to student support and Opportunity Bursaries. Opportunity Bursaries are administered with the other student support funds: hardship and bursary funds, and fee waivers. HEIs were notified of their initial allocations in HEFCE 00/50. However, following the consultation exercise in 00/50, the Secretary of State agreed to extend parts of the Excellence Challenge, including Opportunity Bursaries, to the EAZs not in EiC areas. This meant that a further 910 Opportunity Bursaries were made available. Therefore we had to re-calculate HEIs' initial allocations: the revised allocations are listed in the main guidance on student support, HEFCE 01/15 (see part 2, page 11).

## Summary analysis of initial strategic statements

1. Initial strategic statements were submitted by HEIs in October 1999, following the request in HEFCE 99/33, 'Widening participation in higher education'. An analysis of these statements was carried out by Action on Access, the HEFCE's national co-ordination team for widening participation. A summary is given below; the full report is on the HEFCE web-site [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) with this document, under 'Publications'.

2. The initial strategic statements were analysed by taking the seven broad criteria outlined in HEFCE 99/33 and dividing them into 12 guidance indicators (see below). The HEFCE regions (including Northern Ireland) were taken as the unit of analysis. The team also factored the size of the statements into their analysis as there were significant differences in the length of the statements submitted.

A	Aims and objectives
A	Mechanisms for achieving aims and objectives
B	Links between objectives and corporate/financial/other plans
C	Profile of student population, present/potential
C	Use of performance indicators
D	Identification of under-represented groups
D	Targets for under-represented groups
E	Summary of approaches for improving retention for non-traditional students
E	Targets for student retention for non-traditional students
F	Systems for monitoring progress – quantifiable or other
G	Key partners in widening participation strategy implementation
G	Key collaborative relationships in widening participation strategy implementation

3. The reading of each statement was based on the assessed strength of coverage for each of the 12 guidance indicator areas. A numerical value between 0 and 3 was assigned to each guidance indicator according to the assessed strength of the coverage. The scale equates as follows:

- 0 = not covered
- 1 = covered
- 2 = well covered
- 3 = very well covered.

4. In brief the analysis demonstrated that, while there were many areas of good practice, the statements in general did not take a sufficiently strategic or coherent approach. In particular the team identified insufficient clarity over specific targets related to widening participation, and a fragmented approach to planning.

5. The strongest areas of coverage were:

- a. Aims and objectives – 45 per cent of HEIs scored 2 or 3.
- b. Profile of student population present/potential – 44 per cent of HEIs scored 2 or 3.
- c. Mechanisms for achieving aims and objectives – 34 per cent of HEIs scored 2 or 3.

6. The three weakest areas of coverage were:
  - a. Targets for retention for non-traditional students – 89 per cent of HEIs scored 0 or 1.
  - b. Use of performance indicators – 87 per cent of HEIs scored 0 or 1.
  - c. Targets for under-represented groups – 81 per cent of HEIs scored 0 or 1.
  
7. The analysis showed that some HEIs do not have entirely coherent initial statements. In particular:
  - a. Links were often not made with other strategic documents such as the corporate plan and the equivalent statement on learning and teaching objectives. It was therefore difficult to judge to what degree the approach to widening participation was fully integrated with other institutional activities.
  
  - b. Institutions appeared to devote more attention to recruitment than to retention.
  
  - c. Some HEIs failed to make links between their overall strategy and the specific aims and objectives of their regional partnership projects. It was recognised that this was difficult because the projects involved collaboration among a number of institutions. However, the projects were conceived as a means to stimulate demand for HE and were therefore seen as a keystone in the HEIs' individual plans for widening participation.
  
8. In terms of the sector as a whole the analysis showed that HEIs are not yet good at setting targets, particularly in relation to their overall strategy. However, at the individual level there was a wide spectrum of responses. A minority of institutions have set explicit target outcomes, and many more have set clear measurable targets related to the level and nature of their activities rather than their outcomes. However, too many HEIs have failed to set targets that can be easily measured. This finding is supported by an initial analysis of the sector's annual operating statements for 1999-2000, where institutions reported progress towards targets. The analysis also shows that HEIs generally find it easier to express widening participation targets qualitatively, rather than quantitatively.