

## Funding for widening participation in higher education

### **A response to HEFCE consultation document 02/22 from The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)**

CIHE welcomes the broad thrust of the proposals contained in this document. We have argued elsewhere (1) that the current plethora of initiatives should be reduced and consolidated and that funding should facilitate and reinforce the efforts of institutions to focus on what they do best. Equally we recognise the pressures for all institutions to have strategies in place to support widening participation.

We agree that a rapid expansion in participation rates cannot be achieved if institutions offer watered-down versions of programmes designed for an elite system. Much has happened and there is much innovation. But there will need to be still further changes both to the courses on offer, the process of learning and the support systems available to students across institutions (para 11). More joined-up delivery engaging academic and personal tutors, administrators and staff involved in career and educational guidance could raise the quality of the student experience and retention rates. The consultation document does not fully articulate the desirability of this joined-up approach.

While we appreciate the argument that "future growth in student numbers will depend upon more pupils staying on at school and attaining level 3 qualifications" (para 18), we would reiterate our argument (2) that widening participation must not just relate to school leavers. If there are 5 million people with level 3 qualifications currently, then that is an enormous potential market that has been too neglected by most higher education institutions. Raising the skill levels of those in work should be a feature of HEFCE and government policy and we would urge that you invite institutions to have strategies to better address this potential.

We agree that there are close links between widening participation and developing employability (para 24d). Indeed the argument that "the more you learn the more you earn" and the less chance you have of being unemployed (as confirmed in our recent report (3)) might usefully be re-emphasised.

This leads us to restate our earlier view (4) that all links in the widening participation and employability chain should be considered and linked in a coherent strategy. The employer dimension must not be ignored. Employers have an important role in recruiting for diversity and sending positive messages that they value all those who have developed their learning and their desire to continue to learn and apply their learning. Our document *Recruiting from a Wider Spectrum of Graduates* and the accompanying *Guidelines for Employers* developed following consultation with the Equal Opportunities Commission, the CBI, CIPD and others is relevant (5). We would be pleased to make the *Guidelines* in particular available free of charge to institutions as they engage with employers and seek to persuade them to recruit from as wide a spectrum as possible.

To support student progression and reward institutions for having encouraged individuals to take steps down the learning road, we would support proposals for funding to be related to the completion of discrete units of learning (whether those be modules or semesters) (paras 42/43). Greater alignment with similar practices in the Learning + Skills Sector would encourage lifelong learning.

Finally, we would stress that there are substantial additional costs in both reaching out and attracting students from non-traditional backgrounds and then supporting them when they join an institution and while they are on a course. The process of learning for such students may well be more resource intensive. Overall we note the view of PA Consulting that the additional costs could be of the order of 35% (6). This confirms work done for us by PWC in the North East that suggests the additional costs could be in the range of an additional 25-40%. We therefore suggest, (reference your para 56b) that additional funds should be allocated on the basis of the additional costs incurred.

We have said that we would be pleased to play our part in any wider Forum that might be established to help ensure a co-ordinated approach to an issue that CIHE has for long cared about and is trying to engage more employers and their organisations in addressing.

## References

- (1) Funding by Mission, Nigel Brown for CIHE and SCOP
- (2) CIHE response to HEFCE consultation document Partnerships for Progression, March 2002
- (3) *Financial Returns to Undergraduates, Conlon and Chevalier for CIHE, May 2002*
- (4) *ibid (2)*
- (5) *Recruiting from a Wider Spectrum of Graduates, Purcell, Morley and Rowley for CIHE, May 2002*
- (6) *Universities UK and HEFCE, Determining the Costs of Widening Participation: Pilot Study April 2002*