

## Response to Consultation on arrangements for supporting widening access

Submitted 22 July 2016 to the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

In July 2016, HEFCE invited responses to their proposals to reform funding for widening access and supporting successful student outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students. Their proposals were set out in response to their Grant Letter from the Government, which outlined their new vision for higher education funding and social mobility. [You can read the HEFCE proposals here.](#)

Questions regarding this response should be directed to [president@hertfordshire.su](mailto:president@hertfordshire.su)

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### National collaborative outreach programme

1. To what extent do you agree that we should discontinue the widening access element of the funding we previously identified as the student opportunity allocation from 2017-18?

Agree

### Student premium

2. To what extent do you agree with the proposal that the full-time student premium should include a supplement with a weighting based on the recruitment of students who are both at risk and from the most disadvantaged backgrounds?

Agree

### Supporting disabled students

3. What source(s) of data do you consider should be used to determine the level of disabled students allocation to each institution?

We would suggest that the level should be determined by the number of students declaring a disability, as collected by HEIs and registered with HESA, presumably as comparative data. This would need to be updated annually for both new entrants and returning students, due to the number of students who declare during their studies.

The allocation should reflect the needs of each disability and include guidelines on support HEIs should offer, as the Disabled Students Allowance did; for example, note takers and software for SpLD students, and counselling and mentors for students reporting mental health problems. Ensuring that disabled students receive a similar and adequate level of support wherever they study around the country is paramount.

**4. Do you have any other comments or advice on our proposals for supporting widening access and successful student outcomes?**

With all of these funding streams we stress the need for a framework on supporting access and student outcomes for disadvantaged groups. We recommend that HEIs are distributed more prescriptive guidelines and advice on access activity that supports student retention and outcomes, to ensure that students receive a similar level of effective support wherever they are in the country. In particular we would seek assurances that disadvantaged students see immediate benefits from the funding, whenever financial support or in-kind support that limits the cost of study for the lowest socioeconomic groups.

We are concerned that expectations on HEIs to use investment commitments within their own access agreements to deliver broader access activity will not be met sufficiently. As suggested within these proposals, HEIs that recruit a larger proportion of WP students tend to commit a smaller proportion of investment through access agreements. Alongside a number of other new widening access expectations being set to HEIs including within the Teaching Excellence Framework there needs to be consideration made to the funding available within HEIs to meet a wider and more extensive variety of commitments. This is crucial to ensure that no disadvantaged student falls through the gaps in funding and starts from a real level playing field.

On the student premium, we welcome the move to consider the real socioeconomic barriers to students, and that this more targeted approach involving a number of metrics will provide funding where it is most appropriate. However we are concerned that these definitions might effectively other vulnerable students from support. Where residual household income has been used to calculate disadvantage, both HEIs and students have benefited from the relative universality of the metric. While POLAR data recognises the inequalities that arise from living in a particular area, RHI pinpoints students with the disadvantages of low income and less familial support. Similarly, we are concerned by the definition of at risk students. By defining students by entry qualification there is a danger that support could become a perverse incentive that unintentionally ignores disadvantaged students who have already overcome other barriers to achieve more qualifications.

We welcome the move to encourage collaborative outreach to areas where attainment and participation levels do not meet. However we recommend that outreach activity be widened to include students earlier in the education cycle, as raising aspirations at an earlier age has been proven to have an effect on HE participation later on. This is particularly significant given that students choose their effectively restricting their academic options, much earlier in the education cycle than most current outreach activity accounts for.