

## Higher Education in the South West Update on regional priorities 2008/09

### Purpose

This document is designed to update the Regional Skills Partnership Board (RSPB) on progress towards addressing the regional priorities for higher education (HE) agreed in 2005.

The priorities are divided into four areas reflecting national HE policy priorities: widening participation, learning and teaching, research and knowledge transfer.

### Widening participation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address low levels of non-traditional progression including from (and within) the workplace</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor the potential negative impact of variable fees on the participation of under-represented groups in HE and seek to address any issues that occur.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase take up of HE in areas with low participation or with limited access to HE, notably in rural and coastal areas.</li> </ul>

The headline statistics on participation in the South West (SW) show good progress. Participation by under represented groups has improved since 2005-06, and improved at a higher rate than the national average:

		2006-07	2005-06	% change
South West	<i>From NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6 and 7</i>	27.6	26.6	3.76%
	<i>From state schools or colleges</i>	85.6	83.6	2.39%
England	<i>From NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6 and 8</i>	30.1	29.5	2.11%
	<i>From state schools or colleges</i>	87.7	87.4	0.36%

Source: HESA Percentage of young full-time first degree entrants from under-represented groups, by Government Office region [ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/category/2/32/141/> ]

In 2008-09 SW HEIs received over £27m in HEFCE grant in recognition of their work to support and retain widening participation students, supplemented by an additional £4.6m through Aimhigher for targeted projects with schools and colleges.

In terms of workplace participation, the Higher Level Skills Pathfinder will come to the end of its HEFCE funding in 2009. Last year's interim evaluation suggested that good progress has been made, but we await the outcomes of a summative evaluation to judge its impact. The Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) have also contributed in this area, working with employers such as FlyBe to create tailored HE provision.

The DIUS will be leading on assessing the impact of variable fees nationally looking at three year trend data. Anecdotally and based on crude background data it would seem that variable fees appear to have had very little impact on participation. Certainly the participation data above suggest that there is no impact on young participation. Indeed many institutions are saying that bursaries are having a positive impact on retention of students.

In terms of rural/coastal access to HE in 2008 we consulted on New University Challenge, an initiative aimed at increasing access to HE in 'cold spots'. In the SW, we have already received expressions of interest from Somerset, Salisbury and Weymouth to establish HE centres in response to the consultation. In addition, we continue to fund the development of the Combined Universities in Cornwall and in 2008 funded HE centres in North and South Devon Colleges through the University of Plymouth. The impact of CUC has been widely publicised and indeed several SW projects are seen as national exemplars of widening access within rural communities - including the work of Plymouth and Bournemouth Universities.

## Learning & Teaching

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number and proportion of student places in the South West to meet demand and support regional economic, social and cultural goals.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase flexible learning and high quality student experiences in the region, ensuring a range of entry points and progression opportunities for learners, in particular those in the workplace without previous experience of HE</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure greater employer engagement in the development and delivery of HE which is sufficiently flexible to meet the skills needs of the employer and the learner, and in the greater financial commitment to HE.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to the demand from employers and learners for subjects that are of strategic importance to the South West and to ensure that those subjects that are nationally important are available in the SW.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve leadership and management skills in the South West</li> </ul>

In 2006-07 there were over 140,000 students studying in the South West and numbers continue to grow. In 2006-08 and 2007-08 we allocated 15% of the funding available for growth in Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) to the region.

This growth is reflected in measures of offers and acceptances:

#### Admissions and acceptances to HE courses (SW)

	<b>2007 entry</b>		<b>2006 entry</b>		<b>% change</b>	
	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>
<b>STEM subjects</b>	52,628	9,244	47,036	8,488	11.89	8.91
<b>Business &amp; Administration</b>	22,233	3,860	19,110	3,602	16.34	7.16
All subjects	199,717	33,613	177,276	30,973	12.66	8.52

#### Admissions and acceptances to HE courses (England)

	<b>2007 entry</b>		<b>2006 entry</b>		<b>% change</b>	
	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>
<b>STEM subjects</b>	467,029	85,667	437,485	81,408	6.75	5.23
<b>Business &amp; Administration</b>	244,780	42,466	220,052	39,287	11.24	8.09
All subjects	1,973,194	345,181	1,835,600	325,254	7.50	6.13

Source: UCAS admissions data [[http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about\\_us/stat\\_services/stats\\_online/](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about_us/stat_services/stats_online/)]

These tables show that both applications to SW institutions and acceptances have increased over the last two years and increased at a level above the national average. In STEM and Business & Administration, key subject areas for the region, this is also true and suggests that the offer by HEIs in the region is attractive to applicants.

Over a five year period the picture is an interesting one. In 2007 the SW had 10.1% of the national population (9.7% of young people) but only 7.9% of all UG students. For STEM subjects the SW has 8.3% of students, and for Business & Administration 8.6%. If population and demographic increases are factored in, then the number of undergraduate students relative to the young population of the SW has stayed roughly static. Although in absolute terms STEM provision is growing in the region, STEM students relative to the young population is at the lowest level for 5 years. This mirrors the English trend but is more marked in the SW.

The flexibility of learning opportunities is difficult to show in metrics. However, there are a number of initiatives that will have an impact here – the higher level skills pathfinder and the two LLNs explicitly address workplace learners while the flexible learning pilots at Gloucestershire and Plymouth Universities are designed to test the market for accelerated degrees. Increasing the flexibility of the HE offer is not a quick fix; it requires changes to curriculum development, assessment, student support, staff contracts etc. HEFCE has distributed £103m to 56 projects nationally to address this kind of issue, unfortunately only one of these projects was in the SW.

## Research

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the continued development of the regional infrastructure for the enhancement of research collaboration in the SW</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build sustainable capacity in HE research targeted on areas of competitive advantage</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote HE / Business interactions, to maximise business R&amp;D spend and encourage HE to undertake more research relevant to business</li> </ul>

Identified in 2005 was the relatively low level of income that SW HEIs derive from business. The HE Business and Community Interaction Survey (HEBCIS) in some cases shows an improvement although from a low starting point (such as in collaborative research as seen below). Contract research also shows an improving position in relation to numbers of contracts, but the increase in the value of these is not as strong as the England average.

### Total income from collaborative research

	<b>Total (£000s)</b>		<b>% change</b>
	2006-07	2005-06	
South West	21,576	17,339	24.44
England	487,949	441,357	10.56

### Contract research

	<b>Total number of contracts</b>			<b>Total value of contracts (£000s)</b>		
	2006-07	2005-06	% change	2006-07	2005-06	% change
South West	2,134	1,594	33.88	38,785	34,602	12.09
England	22458	19391	15.82	663923.8	554729.7	19.68

Source: Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey, 2006-07

Funding for research will change in 2009 following the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. The RAE is a peer review process that examines research outputs to assess their relative quality and is also used to calculate the level of research funding received by institutions. This in turn determines the research infrastructure within institutions that businesses, government and charities are able to access.

The RAE has become a well recognised indicator of esteem but can be misused and due to changes in way results are reported is difficult to compare with the previous exercise in 2001. However, as an example of performance in the SW, of the business schools that submitted their research to the RAE, the following percentages show how much of that research was judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour:

Bath	70%
Exeter	60%
Bournemouth	30%

Plymouth	30%
UWE	30%
Bristol	30%

Gloucester	20%
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## Knowledge Transfer

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stimulate better and more informed engagement between HE, business and the community</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase student/business interactions and promote better graduate utilisation in the labour market</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase Knowledge Exchange between HEIs and SMEs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster and support an enterprise culture in the region</li> </ul>

Funding by the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) helps to support knowledge transfer in the region. In 2008-09 SW institutions received over £9m in HEIF funding, and will have been allocated over £31m over the three year period of the programme to 2010-11

In terms of progress -

### Value of CPD and CE to business in the south west.

	<i>revenue from CPD and CE (£000s)</i>		
	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>SMEs</b>	1,848	1,964	-5.91
<b>other commercial businesses</b>	2,377	1,936	22.78
<b>non-commercial organisations</b>	7,314	8,357	-12.48
<b>individuals (including self employed)</b>	6,525	5,244	24.43
<b>total</b>	18,064	17,501	3.22

### Value of CPD and CE to business in England

	<i>revenue from CPD and CE (£000s)</i>		
	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>SMEs</b>	26,060	23,419	11.28
<b>other commercial businesses</b>	109,105	93,734	16.40
<b>non-commercial organisations</b>	155,675	119,365	30.42
<b>individuals (including self employed)</b>	110,738	99,758	11.01
<b>total</b>	401,578	336,276	19.41

Source: Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey, 2006-07

[[http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08\\_22/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_22/)].

Given the importance of SMEs within the SW economy, the decline in the value of CPD to SMEs is surprising. It is reflected in other measures in the HEBCIS and may indicate any number of things including the type of SMEs in the region, a reluctance of SMEs to work with Universities or a lack of match between the HEI offer and SME need.

The increase in value of CPD to individuals may also say something about the nature of the SW market as this includes self-funded courses that may not relate directly to work, but could indicate a population interested in lifelong learning.

According to the HEBCIS SW universities also receive the lowest level of RDA programme grants of all regions and receive significantly lower levels of regeneration and development funding than other regions.

In 2006-07 the region's HE institutions had stakes in 41 spin out companies. This is a slight reduction on the previous years' figure of 55, but is offset by an increase in the number of spin-offs with no HEI ownership. These companies turned over a total of £36.5 million (up from £25.8 million in 2005-06) and employed 552 staff.

Overall there is mixed progress in this area – the HERDA-SW Business Engagement group may have undertaken further work on why this might be.