

A New University Challenge **18th September 2008**

HEFC invite responses to their consultation on a new 'University Challenge'. They wish to ensure that there is a transparent and fair mechanism for assessing bids for 20 new Higher Education centres by 2014. There is £150 million to support this initiative from HEFC between now and 2010-11. Responses to the consultation are due on Friday 17th October. The document can be viewed at:-

[www.hefc.ac.uk/publications/HEFCE Publications2008/2008/27](http://www.hefc.ac.uk/publications/HEFCE%20Publications2008/2008/27)

AoC Position

- AoC notes that any future HEFC funding will be channelled through a lead institution and if there is 'substantial' capital investment this will be a current Higher Education centre (HEI). However FE colleges that gain Foundation Degree Awarding powers during this period would be able to propose 'a more focused HE Centre' again in partnership with an HEI. AoC has concerns with HEFC's general approach to FE colleges designation as HEIs. The time is right to re evaluate the role that FE colleges can play in designing a different landscape of HE provision. AoC would expect colleges with the requisite proportion of HE provision to be able to bid independently of an HEI.
- AoC supports criteria for judging the bids in terms of developing a skilled workforce that serves local businesses, widening participation, ensuring progression routes from Level 3 and an ability to demonstrate new and sustainable demand. AoC notes that these have been the focus and success of FE colleges in the development of their current HE provision.
- AoC supports the partnership approach to bids with the expected involvement of Regional Development Agencies, Local Authorities, local employers and the community.
- However we want to create a climate in which responsiveness to employers, at which colleges excel, is reflected in these opportunities for expansion. We would like to see a greater emphasis on flexible learning, non traditional teaching and learning methods and a close relationship between delivery and the workplace.
- AoC would also wish to see evidence of strategies that develop progression routes from Apprenticeships into higher study. This will allow colleges to deliver to higher level vocationally related programmes of study, developed with employers input.
- AoC would advocate criteria for assessment that include strategies for raising aspirations amongst those people currently not in education, employment or training.

- Employers would be encouraged by additional benefits that could accrue from an emphasis on developing enterprise skills and using the new centres to increase business competitiveness through knowledge transfer.
- In defining the characteristics of a successful HE centre which will be part of the assessment criteria, AoC agrees that partnership and sustainability are fundamental. However there is an under developed criterion on management capacity. It is unclear what evidence is required. AoC would discourage the use of external validation through OFSTED and Framework for Excellence of management capacity unless there are similar robust measures in place for HEIs. AoC would encourage a clearer definition of management capacity that does not require an additional evidence burden.
- Looking to a future HEI development for students who are not currently in higher study, AoC would like to encourage bidders to evidence innovative and motivating teaching and learning, robust student support systems and evidence of retaining students in current programmes.

AoC recognises the need to use common and available evidence bases that prove a need for HE expansion and sustainability. It would emphasise that this should be collected from currently available sources and that any additional evidence is developed centrally and used by all bidders.