



Briefing Note: A new 'University Challenge'

- 1 In March 2008, the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) issued a policy statement *A new 'University Challenge': unlocking Britain's talent*.
- 2 In July 2008, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) issued a policy development consultation paper *A new 'University Challenge': consultation on proposals for new higher education centres*.

DIUS policy

- 3 By 2014, the Government, working with HEFCE, aims to have 20 new university campuses or higher education (HE) centres, providing places for 10,000 students, either open or for which funding has been committed. The objectives for these new HE centres are to:
 - (a) unlock the potential of towns and people: *widening participation and unlocking talent; attracting and retaining talent in an area; contributing to community wellbeing; responding to population growth.*
 - (b) drive economic regeneration: *creating a highly-skilled workforce with relevant skills for the local business community; job creation and economic growth; stimulating entrepreneurship; engagement with local business to improve competitiveness.*
- 4 A number of HE centres have already been set up. Based on the experience of these, the Government believes that key success factors for new HE centres will include: collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs); collaboration between HEIs and further education colleges (FECs); strong support from local partners and national and supra-national funding bodies; long-term, sustainable planning; management capacity.
- 5 The full DIUS policy statement is available online at:

www.dius.gov.uk/policy/documents/university-challenge.pdf

HEFCE proposals

- 6 In response to the DIUS policy framework, the consultation paper invites comment on HEFCE's proposed mechanism for assessing bids for new higher education centres.

- 7 HEFCE notes that it has already invested significantly in increasing the availability of higher education in communities without a university. Often, this has been through the provision of HE in FECs. Whilst this has been largely successful, there is some evidence that it was not always planned as strategically as it might have been and is not well connected to progression opportunities. Addressing these issues is a priority.
- 8 HEFCE funding for HE centres will be allocated from its Strategic Development Fund. Funding from other sources – e.g. regional development agencies, local authorities, business – will be expected. It is anticipated that the scale of bids will vary significantly according to the objectives of the proposal.
- 9 HEFCE’s priorities for new HE centres include: the creation of a highly skilled workforce with relevant skills for the local business community; increasing higher-level skills, particularly for those with no prior experience of HE; supporting progression arrangements. New HE centres would link with local priorities, including: economic regeneration; employers’ training and skills needs; community needs; stimulating economic growth.
- 10 HEFCE’s approach endorses the Government’s assessment of success criteria for HE centres as summarized in paragraph 4 above.
- 11 Evidence in support of proposed HE centres should consider, within the locality: the accessibility of current HE provision; the need for raising the skills of adults from Level 3 to Level 4; low participation of young people in HE.
- 12 The full HEFCE consultation document is available online at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_27/

Matthew McClelland
Head of Governance

September 2008