



Briefing Note: Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects (SIVS)

- 1 In 2005 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) set up a Strategically Important Subjects Advisory Group, whose policy framework informed the development of a £350million programme of work to support SIVS.
- 2 During 2007 and 2008 the advisory group was reconvened, with the primary aim to review the policy framework that guides HEFCE's approach towards strategically important subjects.
- 3 In October 2008 HEFCE published the final report from the 2008 advisory group, *strategically important and vulnerable subjects*, which sets out the advisory group's advice.
- 4 Since receiving the advisory groups report, HEFCE has subsequently produced a document, *'Sustaining science and other key vulnerable subjects in higher education'* which explains what HEFCE has done and plans to do to ensure that strategically important and vulnerable subjects remain strong in the future.
- 5 Subjects deemed strategically important and vulnerable by the 2008 Strategically Important Subjects Advisory Group are:
 - science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects
 - area studies and related minority languages, including:
 - Arabic and Turkish language studies and other Middle Eastern area studies, former Soviet Union Caucasus and central Asian area studies
 - Japanese, Chinese, Mandarin and other Far Eastern languages and area studies
 - courses relating to recent EU accession countries, especially those in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region
 - modern foreign languages
 - quantitative social science.
- 6 The reports general conclusions are:

- (a) There have been significant improvements in the number of student applications and acceptances for many subjects identified as vulnerable in 2005, although much further work is still needed.
- (b) HEFCE will continue to take an overall view of HE provision. When the individual interests of universities and colleges do not match the national or regional interest HEFCE will continue to target their investment at emerging problems.
- (c) HEFCE intends to implement the key recommendations of the 2008 advisory group, which will include further work with employers to encourage adults to update their skills and to ensure that companies benefit from this.
- (d) Where it is in the national or regional interest, HEFCE will work with other funders to support regional research collaboration and generate new knowledge and discovery in SIVS.
- (e) It should continue to be the Government's role at any given time to designate subjects as being strategically important, and HEFCE's role to consider whether such subjects are vulnerable and the interventions necessary to address this. Decisions on whether a subject is vulnerable will be evidence based.
- (f) A new advisory group will be convened to examine a wide range of indicators of graduate supply and demand, which will report annually to HEFCE and Government. The group will next review the list of vulnerable subjects in 2011, taking into account the range of factors that may impact on SIVS – such as the planned 2009 review of tuition fees.

7 The advisory group's full report is available online at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_38/

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