



Lancashire Skills and Employment Board

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Higher Education (HE) White Paper – Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice

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Executive Summary

This paper provides a summary of the HE White Paper, published by Government in May 2016 and a number of discussion points.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the key points and to contribute to a discussion in regard to implications for Lancashire. It would also be useful for our higher education providers to contribute knowledge and understanding and their thoughts as to the implications for Lancashire, as a Skills and Employment Board member.

Background

The Government published a HE White Paper in May 2016. The paper is titled 'Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice' and outlines a number of reforms which aim to: 1) address the lack of clear information available to university applicants; 2) develop an open and diverse sector in which teaching excellence matches that of research; and 3) enhance the capacity to strengthen strategic thinking and investment in research and innovation.

The paper refers to the changes post-92, which brought former polytechnics into the university system, increases in the diversity of higher education provision, and the increase from 19% of young people in 1990 entering university to almost 40% in 2013 – with more people from disadvantaged backgrounds attending than ever

before. The introduction of student loans and the removal of the student number cap has given greater choice and has supported greater competition in the sector. The paper sets out reforms which will build on those made previously – opening up the market further to enable greater competition and diversity in HE providers combined with more flexible approaches to delivering provision; moves to increase transparency of data about teaching alongside the introduction of a 'Teaching Excellence Framework'; and further engagement of students from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Key proposals

- A simplified regulatory environment which will reduce unnecessary barriers to entry for providers who wish to achieve Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) or call themselves a University. The Government are clear that they wish to encourage competition to drive up standards, and that they are 'not in the business of rescuing failing institutions'.
- Greater, transparent information will be available in relation to teaching quality to support the decision making of potential students. This will enable students to make informed choices, and drive up standards. This will also include greater focus on employability and support in relation to career planning and a link between higher education and tax data to chart the transition of graduates from higher education into the workplace – providing further information about the cost of learning compared with the potential rewards.
- The paper states that teaching, for too long, has been the 'poor cousin to research' and that unacceptable variability in the quality of teaching needs to be addressed. A 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) will be introduced which will aid benchmarking, improve transparency of data and drive up standards. A trial will be run in 2017/18.
- The Government wish to drive greater flexibility in provision, for example accelerated degrees, part-time study, credit accumulation systems which enable modular approaches (credits per module which can add up to achieve a certificate of higher education, diploma or full degree) and Degree Apprenticeships. A review of evidence on the success of credit transfer and accumulation systems is due to be launched.
- There will be greater transparency in admissions policies to support widening participation. English 18 year olds from the most advantaged backgrounds were 6.3 times more like to go to higher tariff institutions in 2015 than those from the least advantaged backgrounds; demonstrating that more progress needs to be made to broaden diversity. Specific reference is made to white males from lower socio and economic backgrounds and black and minority ethnic students.

- 10 arms-length Government bodies will be reduced to two: a single market regulator, the Office for Students (OfS) (bringing together the Office for Fair Access and aspects of the Higher Education Funding Council for England - HEFCE) and a single research and innovation funding body, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) bringing together the existing Research Councils, Innovate UK and aspects of HEFCE.

Points of consideration for the Board

The following points are raised to stimulate discussion at the board:

- What are the implications in regard to the potential for new entrants into the Higher Education market in Lancashire and what is the committee's perspective on this? Are there gaps that could be addressed by encouraging providers into Lancashire?
- In Lancashire we need to increase attainment levels and widen participation as the County is below the national average of people qualified at Level 4+. Is there more that the committee can do to work with providers to increase flexibility to support engagement? For example, are we maximising the opportunity that Degree Apprenticeships present?
- There will be even more focus on the progression of graduates as data regarding destinations and earnings becomes more robust through the tracking of graduates via HMRC. It is important providers of higher education in Lancashire rank well in league tables to continue to attract students to Lancashire – who could then be retained in the labour market. Is there more that we can do to support progression into Lancashire businesses?
- Is there a need to improve information, advice and guidance to young people and adults in regard to the different ways to engage with higher level qualifications? As more innovation emerges in the sector, this may help to engage a wider and more diverse group of Lancashire residents.
- Are there any implications for the ESF project which is currently out to tender in regard to widening participation?

Committee members are also invited to contribute additional points for discussion.