

# Evaluation Of Excellence Challenge: Survey Of Higher Education Providers 2002

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Excellence Challenge Evaluation Consortium

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>IV</b>
Methods	iv
Widening participation activities	v
Collaboration and partnership	v
Staffing and widening participation	v
Admission strategies	vi
Support strategies and student retention	vi
Monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities	vi
Opportunity Bursary scheme	vii
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Evaluation of Excellence Challenge	1
1.2 The Survey of Higher Education Providers	3
<b>2. THE EXCELLENCE CHALLENGE PROGRAMME</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. METHODS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. KEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1 Widening Participation Activities	9
4.2 Collaboration and Partnership	11
4.3 Staffing and Widening Participation	12
4.4 Admission Strategies	14
4.5 Support Strategies and Student Retention	17
4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation of Widening Participation Activities	20
4.7 Opportunity Bursary Scheme	22
4.8 Emerging issues: views about the Excellence Challenge Policy	24
<b>5. SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>27</b>
5.1 Summary	27
5.2 Policy Implications	28
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>ANNEX A AIMS OF EXCELLENCE CHALLENGE</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>ANNEX B WIDENING PARTICIPATION FUNDING AND HEFCE</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>ANNEX C REPRESENTATIVENESS OF SAMPLE</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>ANNEX D ADMISSIONS STRATEGIES</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>ANNEX E OPPORTUNITY BURSARY DECISIONS</b>	<b>38</b>

## FIGURES AND TABLES

### Figures

Figure 1	Excellence Challenge Strands	4
Figure 2	Factors taken into account by admissions staff	15
Figure 3	Strategies to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds	18
Figure A1	Aims and objectives of Excellence Challenge	32
Figure D1	Examples of admissions strategies	37
Figure E1	Examples of how Opportunity Bursary decisions were made	38

### Tables

Table 1	Widening participation activities planned or taken place	9
Table 2	Number of additional full-time equivalent (fte) staff recruited	13
Table 3	Number of full-time equivalent widening participation staff in post	13
Table 4	Increased applications from particular groups	17
Table 5	Type of staff involved in providing support	19
Table 6	Decisions as to who is awarded an Opportunity Bursary	23
Table C1	Comparison of pre-1992 institutions in England and in survey	36
Table C2	Comparison of post-1992 institutions in England and in survey	36

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

The evaluation of the Excellence Challenge programme is being carried out on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by a Consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research, the London School of Economics and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The programme was extended in January 2003 and is now known as 'Aimhigher/Excellence Challenge'. The evaluation is multifaceted with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods being used to evaluate the programme: large-scale surveys of students and tutors in schools and further education sector institutions; surveys of higher education providers; surveys of young people eligible for Opportunity Bursaries; interviews with Excellence Challenge coordinators and area-based studies of specific Challenge partnerships and higher education institutions. The overall aim of the evaluation is to explore the effectiveness of the Aimhigher/Excellence Challenge programme in terms of the extent to which it appears to contribute to increasing and widening participation in higher education.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is responsible for distributing funds on behalf of the government to higher education institutions and further education sector colleges providing higher education programmes. HEFCE's involvement in widening participation predates the Excellence Challenge Programme, and crucially, certain elements of the Excellence Challenge Programme also build on many of these initiatives.

In the Summer Term 2002, a survey of higher education providers in England was conducted. The aim of the survey was to gather information about the relevant activities that had been undertaken by higher education providers as part of their widening participation initiatives and, in particular, as a result of the Excellence Challenge programme. This report provides key findings that emerged from the survey. It also highlights a number of policy implications.

### **Methods**

Postal questionnaires and an accompanying letter were sent to 120 higher education institutions and six further education (FE) sector colleges (in England) providing higher education. All had been allocated Opportunity Bursaries for the academic year 2001/02. Completed questionnaires were returned from a total of 56 institutions, giving an overall response rate of 44 per cent.

The proportion of pre-1992 higher education institutions responding was higher than that in England (45 per cent versus 39 per cent); a similar proportion of post-1992 institutions responded as in England (53 per cent versus 52 per cent); and fewer 'other' institutions, such as specialist colleges, responded than in England (2 per cent versus 9 per cent). The higher education institutions (pre- and post-1992) that responded were similar to those in England in terms of key performance indicators, indicating that the sample was broadly representative of higher education institutions in England.

### **Widening participation activities**

- ♦ The most frequently reported activity (mentioned by 96 per cent of respondents) was summer schools, followed by: presentations to schools by university staff and visits made to reinforce school links by university staff, each mentioned by 88 per cent of respondents.
- ♦ In 75 per cent of institutions there was reported to be a student ambassador scheme and in 70 per cent open days/ACE (Aiming for a College Education) days for widening participation; 70 per cent of respondents reported outreach work with community groups. The mean number of activities offered was 9.5.
- ♦ Thirty-five per cent of respondents from institutions offering summer schools reported that these had been introduced as a result of the Excellence Challenge programme.
- ♦ More pre- than post-1992 institutions offered master classes excluding Advanced Extension Award Master Classes (67 per cent versus 36 per cent) and tutoring of school pupils by university students (75 per cent versus 36 per cent); on the other hand, more post-1992 offered outreach activities (86 per cent versus 58 per cent).

### **Collaboration and partnership**

- ♦ Seventy-seven per cent of respondents reported that outreach activities were provided in collaboration or in partnership with other higher education institutions. The mean number of partners was three. Sixty-six per cent of respondents reported having plans for collaboration or partnership with other higher education institutions.
- ♦ Around a fifth of respondents reported that summer schools (21 per cent) and open days/ACE days for widening participation (20 per cent), were provided jointly with other universities. Other activities frequently provided in collaboration were presentations to schools about university (reported by 16 per cent of respondents) and outreach work with community groups (mentioned by 14 per cent).

### **Staffing and widening participation**

- ♦ Seventy-nine per cent of respondents reported that **additional** staff with responsibility for widening participation had been recruited in 2001/02. The mean number of academic/academic-related staff recruited was 2.0 full-time equivalent (fte); the mean number of outreach staff was 1.8 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 1.4 fte.
- ♦ Eighty-six per cent of respondents reported that staff had been in post before 2001/02. The mean number of outreach staff in post was 2.4 fte; the mean number of academic/academic-related staff was 2.3 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 2.1 fte.
- ♦ Sixty-four per cent of respondents reported that explicit training/guidance for admissions staff to help with widening participation had been provided during 2001/02. This was most frequently provided via workshops (43 per cent of institutions), newsletters/circulars (18 per cent), specific training and conferences/seminars (16 per cent each).

## **Admission strategies**

- ♦ Respondents were asked if, as part of their widening participation programme, their institution had adopted any special admissions strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sixty-three per cent of institutions reported that they had; a number of broad themes were identified: seeking additional background information; compact schemes or equivalent; and lower offers for places. The modal year for the introduction of special admissions arrangements was 2001. The introduction of special admissions strategies was, in the main, as a result of a university initiative or the HEFCE widening participation initiative.
- ♦ A variety of factors were reported to be taken into account by admissions staff in the context of widening participation, when recruiting students. Sixty-three per cent of respondents reported that admissions staff took into account recommendations from schools/colleges with which the institution had links. Fifty-five per cent reported taking account of compacts with schools, colleges or LEAs. Attendance at university-run schools/classes was mentioned by 45 per cent of respondents and attendance at a school with lower than average GCE A level results by 36 per cent.
- ♦ Respondents were asked whether in their opinion their widening participation initiatives had had an impact in terms of increased applications. Forty-six per cent reported that in their view they had had an impact and 9 per cent reported that they had not, 34 per cent did not know and 11 per cent did not respond.
- ♦ In those cases where increased applications were reported (46 per cent), respondents were asked for more details about the groups from which there had been increased applications. The most frequently reported groups from which there had been increased applications were schools/colleges participating in outreach activities; young people from state schools/colleges; and young people from areas with low rates of higher education participation.

## **Support strategies and student retention**

- ♦ Respondents were asked if as part of its widening participation programme, their institution had adopted any special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Seventy-three per cent of respondents reported that they did have such strategies in place; these included study skills workshops/support, tutoring and mentoring.
- ♦ These strategies had generally been introduced recently: the modal year for their introduction was 2001. Two main reasons were given for introducing them: a university initiative to widen participation (mentioned by 50 per cent of respondents) and the HEFCE widening participation initiative (mentioned by 23 per cent).
- ♦ The types of staff most frequently reported to provide support were academic staff, followed by administrative staff in the central administration and at the departmental/faculty level.

## **Monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities**

- ♦ Eighty-two per cent of respondents reported carrying out their own monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities.

- ◆ Eight-two per cent of respondents reported that information on widening participation was disseminated to departments.

### **Opportunity Bursary scheme**

- ◆ Respondents were asked when they informed applicants from Excellence in Cities (EiC) and statutory EAZ areas about Opportunity Bursaries. Sixty-one per cent reported that applicants were informed about the Opportunity Bursary scheme when an offer was made at their institution and 48 per cent informed applicants when an offer was accepted (21 per cent of institutions informed applicants at both stages).
- ◆ Fifty per cent of the respondents felt that it was still too early to comment on whether Opportunity Bursaries had been successful in encouraging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education. However, 27 per cent felt that it had been broadly successful, and 13 per cent that it had been broadly unsuccessful (11 per cent did not know).
- ◆ Forty-three per cent of the respondents did not report any problems associated with who should be awarded an Opportunity Bursary. Fifty-four per cent felt that there had been problems (4 per cent did not respond). Four broad themes emerged: high demand for Opportunity Bursaries and limited supply; unfairness (e.g. restrictions to particular areas); concerns about clarity of guidance; and the administration of Opportunity Bursaries.

### **Emerging Issues**

- ◆ Notwithstanding the fact that the Excellence Challenge programme had only been operational for two terms, since September 2001, when the survey was carried out, some respondents felt that the programme was already improving cooperation between schools, colleges and LEAs, and having a positive impact on the target group.
- ◆ A number of implications for policy arise from this survey of higher education providers:
  - One widening participation activity that was reported to have been introduced as a result of Excellence Challenge by 35 per cent of respondents was the summer schools scheme. The funding for the Excellence Challenge summer schools scheme is hypothecated, suggesting that earmarking funds for certain activities could be a way to directly influence practice in higher education institutions.
  - In 82 per cent of institutions, monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities were reported. However, a considerably smaller proportion (11 per cent) specifically mentioned monitoring the participation and progress of students. Wherever practicable, this should take place, in order for departments and institutions to seek to establish how effective different types of activities are in terms of enhancing widening participation. This may be particularly important for certain types of outreach (e.g. summer schools) where an impact on recruitment might be expected.

- There was a suggestion that some schools may not have the capacity to respond to the Excellence Challenge programme. Local partnerships may be able to facilitate the provision of a range of centrally coordinated activities, thus reducing the burden on schools, and so fostering stronger and more effective links between schools and higher education institutions.
  
- There was a concern about the restriction of the Opportunity Bursary scheme to certain areas and in particular to a '*postcode*' lottery. The re-introduction of student grants from autumn 2004 will address this issue.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Evaluation of Excellence Challenge

The evaluation of the Excellence Challenge programme is being carried out on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by a Consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research, the London School of Economics and the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

The Excellence Challenge programme was established in 2001 with the aim of improving access to higher education for able young students from poorer backgrounds. Its four strands aim:

- ♦ to develop partnerships between schools, colleges and higher education institutions in order to raise aspirations and attainment in Excellence in Cities areas and Education Action Zones and so encourage greater progression to higher education (Strand 1);
- ♦ to increase funding to higher education institutions to reach out to more young people (Strand 2);
- ♦ to provide clearer information and better marketing of the route to higher education for young people (Strand 3); and
- ♦ to pilot new forms of extra financial help – Opportunity Bursaries – for young people from low income backgrounds (Strand 4).

The Government White Paper ‘The Future of Higher Education’ (DfES, 2003c), announced that the coverage of the programme would be widened so that by 2006, 86 new local partnerships would be in place. In addition, the Excellence Challenge programme would be brought together with the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE)/Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Partnerships for Progression (P4P) initiative, which began in 2003, to deliver a coherent outreach programme, called ‘Aimhigher’. In 2003, HEFCE also announced changes to the way in which they fund universities for widening participation activities, replacing the ‘postcode premium’ (see **Annex B**) with the widening participation allocation.

In the short term the Excellence Challenge programme is to be known as ‘Aimhigher/Excellence Challenge’ and ‘Aimhigher’ in the longer term. However, given

that the survey reported here was carried out under the auspices of Excellence Challenge this term is used interchangeably with Aimhigher/Excellence Challenge.

The evaluation is multifaceted with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods being used to evaluate the programme. Methods include:

- ♦ large-scale surveys of students and tutors in schools and further education sector institutions, in order to provide information about such factors as activities undertaken as part of the Excellence Challenge programme and students' attitudes towards education;
- ♦ surveys of higher education providers to establish information about activities aimed at widening participation, and policies and practices in relation to access to higher education and perceived effectiveness;
- ♦ surveys of young people eligible for Opportunity Bursaries to ascertain their characteristics, financial circumstances and experiences;
- ♦ interviews with Excellence Challenge coordinators;
- ♦ area-based studies of specific Challenge partnerships and higher education institutions to explore policy and practice at a local level and the perceived effectiveness of the various strands of the programme.

The overall aim of the evaluation is to explore the effectiveness of the Aimhigher/Excellence Challenge programme in terms of the extent to which it appears to contribute to increasing and widening participation in higher education. Whilst the quantitative methods will enable associations to be established between activities and outcomes, the qualitative methods will seek to explore the processes involved and identify practice that is perceived to be effective in terms of the overall programme aims.

## **1.2 The Survey of Higher Education Providers**

In the Summer Term 2002, as part of the evaluation of the original Excellence Challenge programme, a survey of higher education providers in England was conducted. The aim of the survey was to gather information about the relevant activities that had been undertaken by higher education providers as part of their widening participation initiatives and, in particular, as a result of the Excellence Challenge programme. It is important to stress that the survey was not designed to try and establish the impact of the Excellence Challenge programme on student recruitment or retention within higher education institutions.

This report provides key findings that emerged from the survey. It also highlights a number of policy implications arising from the survey. An outline of the Excellence Challenge programme is given in Section 2. Section 3 provides an overview of the methods adopted and Section 4 presents key findings. These relate to: outreach activities; collaboration with other higher education institutions, schools and colleges; staffing and staff training; admissions; support strategies; monitoring and evaluation; the Opportunity Bursary scheme; and views about the Excellence Challenge programme itself. Section 5 summarises key findings arising from the survey and presents a number of policy implications.

## 2. THE EXCELLENCE CHALLENGE PROGRAMME

The Excellence Challenge programme, at the time the evaluation commenced, was for a duration of three years, beginning in September 2001. The programme builds on the widening participation strategy funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (see Higher Education Consultancy Group (HECG) & National Centre for Social Research (NCSR), 2003). The aim of the programme is to increase and widen participation in higher education among young people, including the number of young people from 'poorer backgrounds who apply for and enter higher education' (DfES, 2002a). Another key related aim is to improve the links between schools, colleges and universities. The programme is divided into four strands (DfES, 2002a). These are outlined in Figure 1 (more details are given in **Annex A**).

**Figure 1. Excellence Challenge Strands**

- ♦ **Strand One** aims to build new links between schools and colleges, to increase participation in post-16 learning, and also to increase the attainment and motivation of young people to enable them to enter higher education.
- ♦ Under **Strand Two**, higher education institutions are provided with additional funding to enable them to 'reach out to more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds', using activities such as summer schools and student ambassadors and also through for example recruiting more admissions staff.
- ♦ **Strand Three** through a campaign known as 'Aimhigher', aims to provide 'clearer information and better marketing of the route to, and benefits of, higher education'.
- ♦ Under **Strand Four** a new form of financial support – the **Opportunity Bursary** – is being piloted for 'young people from low income backgrounds, with little or no family experience of higher education'.

*Source: DfES (2002a)*

This paper relates to two strands, Strand Two and Strand Four. Our interest in Strand Four relates to the administration of the Opportunity Bursary scheme, whilst the focus on Strand Two, is on the particular activities and strategies that relate to widening participation, admissions and support. The specific objectives of **Strand Two**, as identified by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2001a) are to:

- ♦ encourage institutions to widen participation in higher education by under-represented groups;
- ♦ raise the aspirations of all to attend the institution that is best able to match their abilities, interests and needs;
- ♦ ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies.

Under Strand Two, higher education providers, are being given £60 million over the three years of the Excellence Challenge programme, via HEFCE (DfES, 2003a). Institutions have been given some discretion as to the use of this funding, in recognition of the fact that ‘one size does not fit all’ (DfEE, 2000), and perhaps more importantly, that institutions already had diverse approaches to widening participation. As examples of good practice in widening participation, the DfES (2000) provided a list of activities that had been ‘shown to work’ (p. 19). These included:

- ♦ appointment of recruitment staff, including ‘ambassadors’ to reach out to talented young people and to encourage applications;
- ♦ better training and development opportunities for staff engaged in selecting students to ensure a uniformly high quality of selection;
- ♦ action to ensure that admission and selection arrangements are free of any inadvertent bias;
- ♦ enhanced contact between higher education institutions and local schools and further education institutions, including more mentoring and assistance by staff and students;
- ♦ expansion of summer schools and other opportunities for young people and their teachers/tutors to come into contact with higher education institutions, their staff and students;
- ♦ better support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure that they are retained once they enrol in higher education;
- ♦ appointment of a person who will co-ordinate all the outreach work to ensure maximum impact and a clear focus across the institution.

According to Lewis (2002), from the early 1990s widening participation became a priority for higher education institutions and, in particular, for HEFCE (see HECG & NCSR, 2003) which is responsible for distributing government funds to English higher education institutions – although even before this time, some individual institutions were active in this field (Lewis, 2002). Public funds to higher education institutions for widening participation are allocated and distributed by HEFCE (see Xavier and West, 2003). In this context it is important to note that between 2001-02 and 2003-04, £60 million is being distributed under **Strand Two** to higher education providers through HEFCE via three funding streams:

- ◆ the postcode premium;
- ◆ the aspiration premium; and
- ◆ the summer school scheme.

Both the postcode premium and the summer school scheme were pre-existing HEFCE funded initiatives, which Excellence Challenge supported through additional resources (see **Annex B**). However, the **aspiration premium** was a new funding stream under Excellence Challenge providing £6 million a year for each of three years (2001-02 to 2003-04), designed to support outreach work to raise the aspirations of state educated pupils (primarily – but not necessarily – in Excellence in Cities (EiC) and statutory Education Action Zone (EAZ) areas), ‘to attend the institution from which they will derive maximum benefit’ (HEFCE, 2000). This funding is only provided to institutions with an intake of less than 80 per cent of students from state schools and further education sector colleges.

The third funding stream relates specifically to the higher education **summer schools** initiative, which started in 1999-2000 as part of the EiC initiative. In 2001-02, it came under the remit of Excellence Challenge. Each year, £4 million is being allocated to support the summer schools programme for students in Years 11, and initially in 2001 for students in Year 12 as well, from state schools and further education sector colleges in Excellence Challenge areas (i.e. EiC areas and statutory Education Action Zones). The scheme aims to give students a taste of university/college life for one week, and in particular, to encourage students from families and educational backgrounds who may not usually consider higher education, to apply for higher education programmes and also to consider a wider range of institutions and or subjects (HEFCE, 2001a). Thus, Strand Two of Excellence Challenge cannot be considered independently of the widening participation work that is being undertaken within institutions. It should instead be perceived as building on the work already in place.

By way of contrast, **Strand Four**, the Opportunity Bursary scheme was a new initiative, providing certain eligible students with £2,000 over the course of three years with £1,000 given in the first year and payments of £500 made for the second and third years. Opportunity Bursaries are for young people from low income backgrounds with little or no family experience of higher education with the aim of helping these students meet the initial costs of starting a course in higher education, and to offer them some financial confidence when applying for, and completing their studies in higher education (DfES, 2002a). Opportunity Bursaries are allocated to all institutions with

full-time undergraduates, and selected further education colleges providing higher education. For 2001/02 and 2002/03, the bursaries were to be allocated first of all to young people from state schools and colleges in Phase 1 and Phase 2 EiC areas and statutory EAZs, 'provided that the school or college is taking part in the Excellence Challenge programme, and is receiving funding to support this' (DfES, 2002c). In 2001/02, up to a maximum of 7,000 Opportunity Bursaries were made available for allocation (DfES, 2002c).

### 3. METHODS

In April 2002, postal questionnaires and an accompanying letter, were sent to 120 higher education institutions and six further education (FE) colleges (in England) providing higher education. The institutions were selected in conjunction with the DfES. All had been allocated Opportunity Bursaries for the academic year 2001/02.

Completed questionnaires were returned (after reminder letters, telephone calls and e-mails) from a total of 56 institutions, giving an overall response rate of 44 per cent. Twenty-four were pre-1992 universities, 28 were post-1992 universities, one was classified as an 'other' institution and three were FE colleges.

The proportion of pre-1992 higher education institutions responding to the survey was higher than that in England at 45 per cent (compared with 39 per cent in England); however, a similar proportion of post-1992 institutions responded (53 per cent versus 52 per cent in England) and fewer 'other' institutions, such as specialist colleges (two per cent versus nine per cent) responded than in England.<sup>1</sup> The higher education institutions (pre- and post-1992) that responded were similar to those in England in terms of key performance indicators (see **Annex C**), indicating that the sample was broadly representative of higher education institutions in England.

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents (32) who completed the questionnaire were widening participation co-ordinators; the remainder included the institution's head of student marketing/student recruitment; the education liaison manager/school development co-ordinator; and the Excellence Challenge coordinator.

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<sup>1</sup> N=132 - higher education institutions in England; N=53 - sample of higher education institutions.

## 4. KEY FINDINGS

This section presents selected findings from the survey, focusing in particular on: widening participation activities; collaboration; staffing; admissions; support strategies; monitoring and evaluation; the Opportunity Bursary scheme; and views about the Excellence Challenge programme.

### 4.1 Widening Participation Activities

Information on the scope of the widening participation outreach activities provided by institutions in 2001/2002 was sought. Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of possible outreach activities, those that had either been provided, or were planned, for the academic year 2001/02, with particular reference to activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Table 1 gives their responses.

**Table 1. Widening participation activities planned or taken place**

Outreach activity...	Actual/planned activities 2001/02	
	Number of institutions	%
Summer schools	54	96
Visits to reinforce school links by university staff	49	88
Presentations to schools about university	49	88
Student ambassador scheme	42	75
Open days/ACE days for widening participation	39	70
Outreach work with community groups	39	70
Mentoring of school pupils by undergraduates*	33	59
Tutoring of school pupils by university students	29	52
Master Classes**	28	50
Roadshows	25	45
Specialist classes on degree subjects	22	39
Shadowing of university students by pupils	22	39
Revision classes	21	38
Participation in the National Mentoring Pilot	19	34
Saturday schools	19	34
Advanced Extension Award Master Classes	16	29
Winter schools	9	16
Other (e.g. specific projects)	17	30
<b>N = 56</b>		

\* Excluding the National Mentoring Pilot.

\*\* Excluding Advanced Extension Award Master Classes.

More than one answer could be given; total does not equal 56.

As shown in Table 1, the most frequently reported activity (mentioned by 96 per cent of respondents) was summer schools, followed by visits made to reinforce school links by university staff (88 per cent) and presentations to schools by university staff (88 per cent). In 75 per cent of institutions there was reported to be a student ambassador scheme. Open days/ACE (Aiming for a College Education) days for widening participation and outreach work with community groups were each reported by 70 per cent of respondents.

The mean number of activities offered was 9.5 (minimum 4, maximum 18). For pre-1992 institutions the mean number was 10.5 (range 4 to 17) and for post-1992 institutions the mean was 9.1 (range 4 to 15). No obvious underlying factors were identified in terms of the groupings of activities offered.

Some of these widening participation activities had been in place for many years, whilst others had been introduced more recently. In a number of cases certain activities in some institutions – visits by university staff, presentations to schools and tutoring of school pupils by university students were long standing. Other activities had been introduced much more recently. For example, all of those providing a date of introduction for Advanced Extension Award Master Classes<sup>2</sup> (N=15) reported that they had been introduced/were to be introduced between 2001 and 2003 (median 2002). Summer schools, the most frequently mentioned form of outreach, were reported to have been introduced between 1994 and 2002 (median 2000) (49 respondents answered this question).

Whilst universities did not tend to keep precise records of the numbers of students involved in the various outreach activities, there was one notable exception, namely that all institutions offering summer schools, with the exception of one, were able to provide details of the numbers who had been or would be involved in summer schools. The median number of pupils was 90 (the mean was 140, with a minimum of 20 and maximum of 700<sup>3</sup>) (N=53).

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<sup>2</sup> Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) are for the most able GCE Advanced level students; they aim to broaden students' knowledge and understanding of particular subjects areas. AEAs are not 'taught' – rather 'master classes' (provided in phase 1 and 2 Excellence in Cities partnership areas) must offer students stimulating academic activities such as seminars or lectures, by those at the 'leading edge' of their subjects (DfES, 2003b).

<sup>3</sup> Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Thirty-five per cent of respondents from institutions offering summer schools reported that these had been introduced as a result of the Excellence Challenge programme (19). Sixteen had introduced these in 2000<sup>4</sup> and three in 2001. A similar number (20) reported that the summer schools focused on gifted and talented pupils. It is important to note that only some summer schools are funded through Excellence Challenge.<sup>5</sup>

We also compared activities offered by pre- and post-1992 universities. Three statistically significant differences<sup>6</sup> were found. More pre- than post-1992 institutions offered 'other' master classes (67 per cent versus 36 per cent) and tutoring of school pupils by university students (75 per cent versus 36 per cent); on the other hand, more post-1992 offered outreach activities (86 per cent versus 58 per cent). There was also a non-significant trend<sup>7</sup> for more pre- than post-1992 universities to offer Advanced Extension Award Master Classes (42 per cent versus 18 per cent) and shadowing of university students by pupils (54 per cent versus 29 per cent).

## 4.2 Collaboration and Partnership

Respondents were asked to provide details of the number of schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges involved in the outreach activities provided. Presentations about university involved the largest number of institutions (an average of 65), closely followed by visits by university staff (an average of 62). Of the more recently introduced activities, summer schools involved the highest number of institutions – an average of 49.

Twenty per cent of respondents (11) reported that the institutions involved in these outreach activities were from 'all LEAs'. Significantly more of these were pre-1992 than post-1992 institutions (33 per cent versus 7 per cent). Of the remainder, the mean number of LEAs was nine (the median was 6 and the range 2 to 58) (N=39).<sup>8</sup> Seventy-three per cent of the institutions (41) in the sample were carrying out outreach work

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<sup>4</sup> In 2000, prior to the introduction of Excellence Challenge, summer schools were under the auspices of Excellence in Cities.

<sup>5</sup> In 2000, 54 higher education institutions received funding for summer schools for Year 11 and 12 school pupils from Excellence in Cities and statutory Education Action Zone areas (HEFCE, 2001a). The summer schools scheme at that time was under the auspices of Excellence in Cities (see Xavier and West, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> All differences reported as statistically significant are significant at the 5% level or beyond using chi-squared (i.e.  $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>7</sup> Chi-squared,  $p < 0.1$ .

<sup>8</sup> Six respondents did not answer this question.

with LEAs in EiC areas. The mean number of EiC LEAs per institution was 14 (the median was 4) (range 0 to 58).<sup>9</sup>

Seventy-seven per cent of respondents (43) reported that outreach activities were provided in collaboration or in partnership with other higher education institutions (83 per cent of pre-1992 and 75 per cent of post-1992 institutions). The mean number of partners was 3 (range 1 to 12). In 21 per cent of institutions (12), outreach activities were not provided in collaboration with other higher education institutions (one respondent did not answer this question). One respondent volunteered an interesting comment:

*Activities have been developed and discussed in collaboration with other local universities, but delivered singularly. We have delivered joint staff development sessions, working with local universities, schools, colleges, careers etc. We have also delivered joint sessions on Opportunity Bursaries, the Progression Accord etc.*

Summer schools were most frequently provided jointly with other universities (in 21 per cent of institutions<sup>10</sup>); one respondent, for example, noted that there was ‘regional co-ordination of the summer schools’. Other activities frequently provided in collaboration with others were open days/ACE days for widening participation (20 per cent of institutions (11)); presentations to schools about university (16 per cent (9)) and outreach work with community groups (14 per cent (8)). Sixty-six per cent of respondents (37) reported having plans for collaboration or partnership with other higher education institutions. Twenty-five per cent of institutions (14) had no plans, but 13 per cent of these (7 institutions) were already collaborating (9 per cent (5) did not respond).

### **4.3 Staffing and Widening Participation**

Respondents were asked whether any **additional** staff had been recruited with responsibility for widening participation issues in 2001/2002. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents (44) reported that they had recruited such staff; the mean numbers (full-time equivalent) of each category of staff are given in Table 2.

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<sup>9</sup> Six institutions did not work with any EiC LEAs.

<sup>10</sup> 21 per cent (5) of pre-1992 and 25 per cent (7) of post-1992 institutions.

**Table 2. Number of additional full-time equivalent (fte) staff recruited**

	<b>Mean number of staff (fte)</b>	<b>N</b>
Academic/academic-related	2.0	15
Outreach staff	1.8	16
Administrative	1.4	23
Clerical	0.9	10
Other	3.2	4

*A filter question: all those reporting that additional staff recruited and providing data.*

As shown in Table 2, the mean number of academic/academic-related staff recruited was 2.0 fte; the mean number of outreach staff was 1.8 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 1.4 fte. These categories are not necessarily clear cut – as one respondent noted: ‘Two of the academic related staff do outreach work (amongst other work)’.

Because of the longstanding nature of universities’ involvement in widening participation, respondents were also asked if any staff were in post **before** 2001/02. Eighty-six per cent of respondents (48 out of 56) reported that staff had been in post before this time. It is noteworthy that of the 14 per cent of institutions (8) with no staff in post before 2001/02, 11 per cent (6) reported recruiting additional staff in 2001/02.

The mean numbers (full-time equivalent) of different categories of staff are given in Table 3.

**Table 3. Number of full-time equivalent widening participation staff in post**

<b>Category of staff</b>	<b>Mean number of staff (fte)</b>	<b>N</b>
Outreach staff	2.4	20
Academic/academic-related	2.3	26
Administrative	2.1	24
Clerical	1.3	13
Other	6.1	2

*A filter question: all those reporting staff in post and providing data.*

As shown in Table 3, the mean number of outreach staff in post was 2.4 fte; the mean number of academic/academic-related staff was 2.3 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 2.1 fte.

Sixty-four per cent of respondents (36) reported that explicit training/guidance for admissions staff to help with widening participation had been provided during 2001/02.

This was most frequently provided via **workshops** (mentioned by 43 per cent of respondents (24)), **newsletters/circulars** (18 per cent (10)), **specific training** and **conferences/seminars** (16 per cent (9) each).

#### 4.4 Admission Strategies

Respondents were asked if, as part of their widening participation programme, their institution had adopted any special admissions strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sixty-three per cent of respondents (35)<sup>11</sup> reported that they had adopted such strategies. The actual strategies in place varied (see **Annex D**). However, a number of broad themes were identified. The following were mentioned most frequently: seeking additional background information (25 per cent of respondents (14 out of 56)); compact schemes or equivalent (18 per cent (10)); and lower offers for places (13 per cent (7)). One respondent noted that the institution had a special access scheme that involved the completion of:

*an extra form...by the applicant's school/college, giving specific additional information for applicants (UK/EU) from families with no experience of higher education, lower achieving schools/colleges or other educationally deprived backgrounds.*

It is interesting to note that flexible admissions programmes were sometimes combined with attendance at summer schools:

*Flexible admissions scheme in all academic departments e.g. ring-fenced places for widening participation students; slightly lower offer grades; flagged applications (for summer school attendees and those from schools with overall average A level scores of less than 18 points and mature/disabled students).*

In contrast to the above comments, one respondent noted:

*Widening participation is part of the university's mission. Our admissions strategies already address the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These are currently under review.*

The modal year for the introduction of special admissions arrangements was 2001. The introduction of special admissions strategies was reported to be as a result of a university initiative in 63 per cent of institutions (22 out of the 35 that reported having adopted such strategies); the HEFCE widening participation initiative (43 per cent (15

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<sup>11</sup> 75 per cent (18) of pre-1992 institutions and 57 per cent (16) of post-1992 institutions (and one further education sector institution). This difference was not statistically significant.

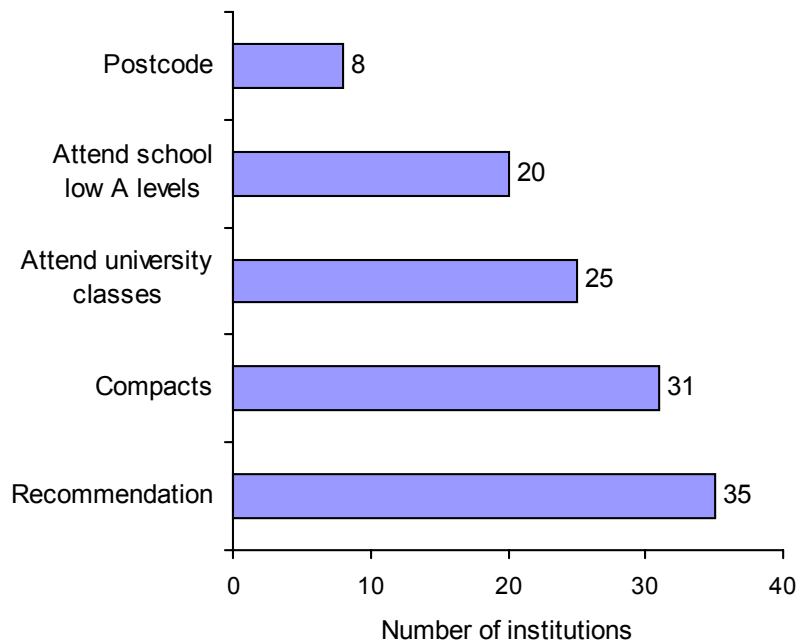
out of 35 institutions)); and Excellence Challenge (9 per cent (3 out of 35 institutions)). Comments included the following:

*[The university's] widening participation initiative – begun by a few key individuals and adopted [across the university]. Widening participation has been included in the [university's] mission statement for several years.*

*Individual initiative – we are heavily oversubscribed and wanted to make the most of the applications from students from non-traditional backgrounds, i.e. give them a better chance of success.*

Related to the general admission strategy is the recruitment process itself. Respondents were asked to indicate whether any of the following factors were taken into account in the context of widening participation: recommendation from a school/college with which the institution has links; attendance at university-run schools/classes; attendance at a school with lower than average General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level results; compacts/partnerships with schools/colleges/LEAs; and postcode. Figure 2 presents the most frequently reported factors (responses relate to 56 institutions – more than one factor could be put forward).

**Figure 2. Factors taken into account by admissions staff**



As can be seen from Figure 2, a variety of factors were reported to be taken into account when recruiting students. Sixty-three per cent of respondents (35) reported that admissions staff took into account recommendations from schools/colleges with which

the institution has links. Fifty-five per cent (31) reported taking account of compacts/partnerships with schools, colleges or LEAs. Attendance at university-run schools/classes was mentioned by 45 per cent of respondents (25), and attendance at a school with lower than average GCE A level results by 36 per cent (20). Two statistically significant differences emerged with more pre-1992 than post-1992 institutions reporting 'attendance at school with lower than average GCSE results' (58 per cent versus 14 per cent); and 'postcode' (29 per cent versus 4 per cent).

A number of other factors were mentioned, for example: *'Personal statement, interview, essay, psychometric tests, sample of previous work'*. One respondent however noted that it was *'impossible to make general statements about what admissions staff take into account'*.

Respondents were asked whether in their opinion their widening participation initiatives had had an impact in terms of increased applications. Forty-six per cent (26) reported that in their view they had had an impact and 9 per cent (5) reported that they had not (34 per cent of respondents (19) did not know and 11 per cent (6) did not respond). It is of interest to note that one of those who reported not knowing if the widening participation initiatives had had any impact in terms of increased applications commented:

[The university] *continues to perform well against its [widening participation] performance indicator benchmarks and the outreach activities contribute to this – we have evidence of the impact of student tutoring upon pupils' aspirations to progress to higher education and track means of determining this at the moment.*

In those cases where increased applications were reported (N=26), respondents were asked for more details about the groups from which there had been increased applications. These are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Increased applications from particular groups**

<b>Increased applications from...</b>	<b>Number of institutions</b>	<b>%</b>
Young people from schools/colleges involved in outreach activities	19	73
Young people from state schools/colleges	14	54
Young people from areas with low rates of participation in HE	14	54
Young people from lower income groups	13	50
Young people from ethnic minority groups	11	42
Mature students	10	38
Disabled students	7	27

**N = 26**

*A filter question: all those reporting increased applications.  
More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 26.*

As shown in Table 4, of those reporting increased applications (N=26), the most frequently reported groups from which there were increased applications were schools/colleges participating in outreach activities, followed by young people from state schools/colleges, and those from areas with low rates of higher education participation. One respondent noted: *'We don't yet have the capacity to monitor this across all applications. It is our **impression** that applications from the local target area have increased'* but also noted *'we can and do track applications from Sutton Trust summer school graduates'*. This suggests that there is the capacity to track the progress of students involved in certain types of outreach work (see also **Section 5.2**).

#### **4.5 Support Strategies and Student Retention**

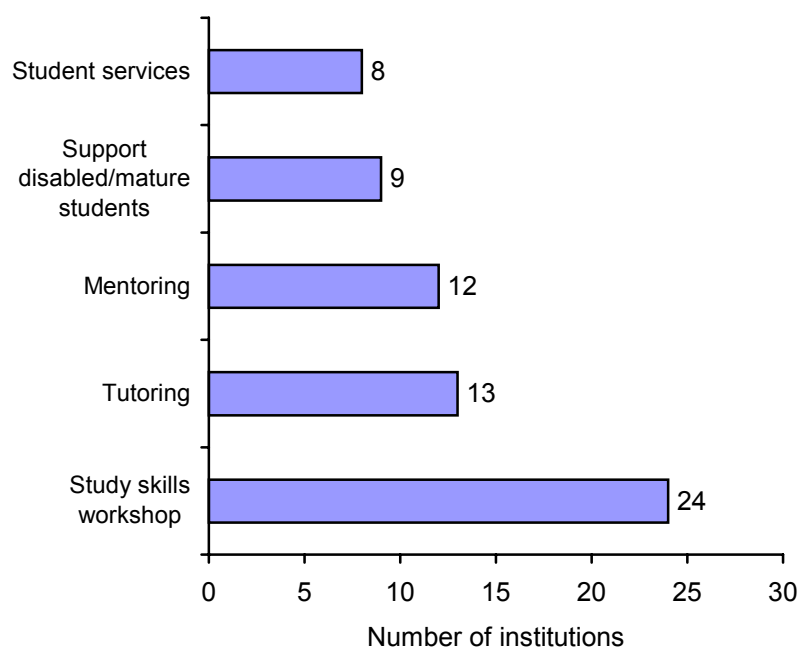
In order to achieve the objective of widening participation in higher education, it is important not only to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds but also to retain these students.

Respondents were asked if as part of its widening participation programme, their institution had adopted any special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Seventy-three per cent of respondents (41) reported that they did have such strategies in place. The most frequently reported approaches are presented in Figure 3.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> There were no statistically significant differences between pre- and post-1992 institutions.

**Figure 3. Strategies to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds**



As shown in Figure 3, in 24 institutions, study skills workshops/support were offered. Other strategies included tutoring and mentoring, for example: *‘Special allocation of supportive personal tutors’* to students who have lower than normal grades. Other mechanisms included support for disabled/mature students and student services/financial support. Often several support mechanisms were in place (the mean was 2.5 and the range 1 to 6):

*Bursaries for local students; computer/book loan scheme; integration/introduction of study skills programmes; additional careers service support; additional tutorial support in some departments; more support from student finance office staff; bursaries to travel to interview.*

*The university offers wide-ranging support to all students including: mentoring, shadowing, introduction to study day – retention/transition activity; induction talks, mature learners’ days etc; study support and workshops in departments as well as comprehensive counselling and welfare are also available.*

These strategies had generally been introduced recently; the modal year for the introduction of these strategies was 2001. When asked what prompted these strategies to be introduced, two main answers were given, namely a university initiative to widen participation (mentioned by 50 per cent of respondents (28)); and the HEFCE widening participation initiative (mentioned by 23 per cent of respondents (13)). Four per cent of respondents (2), specified that support strategies had been introduced or enhanced as direct result of Excellence Challenge. *‘Our own initiative but HEFCE/Excellence*

*Challenge has led to their updating and revived emphasis over the last two years'. By way of contrast, one institution with a long standing commitment to widening participation commented: 'The university has 100 years of providing educational opportunity for the disadvantaged. In 1998 a new strategic approach to student support was adopted'.*

Respondents were also asked whether they had any evidence of the efficacy of the strategies adopted. Of the 41 respondents (73 per cent) who reported having adopted such strategies, ten felt that there was no evidence of their efficacy as yet; eight felt that there was evidence for some programmes; four mentioned increased retention; four mentioned positive feedback; and three mentioned improved achievement/grades.<sup>13</sup> One respondent who noted that there was some evidence commented:

*Indicators of success: feedback from students, usage levels, commendations in QAA [Quality Assurance Agency] subject reviews, high performance in destination rates of graduates, increased recruitment to pre-sessional activities.*

In another case, the respondent reported that a 'research project (establishing the needs of students from low participation neighbourhoods)' was in progress.

Respondents were asked about the types of staff involved in providing support. Table 5 provides details of specific categories of staff mentioned most frequently.

**Table 5. Type of staff involved in providing support**

<b>Type of staff involved in providing support</b>	<b>Number of institutions</b>	<b>%</b>
Departmental/faculty academic staff	32	78
Staff within central administration	28	68
Departmental/faculty administrative staff	25	61
College/school teachers	10	24

**N = 41**

*A filter question: all those reporting special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.*

*More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 41.*

<sup>13</sup> There was no overlap between 'some programmes' and 'increased retention', or 'positive feedback' or 'improved achievement/grades'. Six respondents reported that there was already high retention (some respondents gave more than one answer). Eleven respondents did not answer this question.

As shown in Table 5, the types of staff most frequently reported to provide support were academic staff, followed by administrative staff in the central administration and at the departmental/faculty level.<sup>14</sup>

Respondents were also asked if they had any special support strategies for students with ‘lower than standard entry requirements’; half (28) reported having strategies in place. The most commonly mentioned strategies were (number of institutions in brackets):

- ♦ Study support/study skills (14);
- ♦ Foundation programmes (6);
- ♦ Summer schools (4); and
- ♦ Special links/support pre-post entry (4).

Respondents were asked to describe the strategies adopted. One commented:

*Some faculties offer diagnostic testing in maths and English and provide additional tuition in these subjects and study skills; other faculties have tailored the curriculum for Year 1 to cater for mixed ability intakes; one faculty has undertaken a survey of its students to identify the ones most at risk.*

Another commented that the university offered ‘*Year 0 courses. Special additional classes in some areas e.g. maths, study skills units. SATs (Scholastic Assessment Tests) on entry to confirm potential.*’

In another institution, it was reported that a ‘*Foundation Programme in science and engineering (year 0)*’ had been introduced in 1994 because of the institution’s difficulty in attracting suitably qualified students into these disciplines. It is ‘*now a major part*’ of the widening participation strategy. In terms of the efficacy of this strategy there was reported to be an ‘*80 per cent pass rate – the majority of students go on to graduate despite low initial entry qualifications*’.

#### **4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation of Widening Participation Activities**

Respondents were asked whether their institution carried out its own monitoring and evaluation of its widening participation activities. Eighty-two per cent of respondents

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<sup>14</sup> No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of the types of staff providing support.

(46) reported doing so.<sup>15</sup> They were asked about both macro-level and micro-level monitoring and evaluation. At a macro-level the following approaches were mentioned most frequently by respondents who provided information (N=36):

- ◆ Reports to widening participation strategy group/steering group (17);
- ◆ Analysis of recruitment/retention data (15); and
- ◆ Annual monitoring through HEFCE operating statement (14).

The following comments are typical of those made about monitoring and evaluation:

*Analysis of recruitment data (applications, offers, acceptances). Widening participation reported to the [widening participation] advisory group.*

*All [widening participation] postcode funded activities produce progress reports and regularly feedback to the university's widening participation task group. Targets are set for activities and achievement against these are reported in the annual operating statements to HEFCE.*

At a micro-level, 68 per cent of respondents (38) reported on the monitoring or evaluation carried out; 61 per cent (34) reported that they evaluated all or most of their individual widening participation activities; a small proportion (11 per cent (6)) also stated that they monitored the participation and progress of students. Different types of monitoring/evaluation took place; one noted that: *'All awareness raising events evaluated through written feedback from participants, school staff, student ambassadors'*. In some cases, specific reference was made to tracking student progress:

*Every event is evaluated by questionnaire or other feedback. Student participation and progression tracked via database.*

*Examples include: [widening participation] special-funded project on student tutoring – evaluation of impact of tutoring on [widening participation]. Evaluation of HEFCE summer school including follow-up of participants...*

Eighty-two per cent of respondents (46) reported that information on widening participation was disseminated to departments.<sup>16</sup> Virtually all reported that this dissemination was provided to all departments. However, as one commented: *'but only some people take any notice'*.

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<sup>15</sup> No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of the percentage reporting monitoring and evaluation.

<sup>16</sup> No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of dissemination of information to departments.

A range of different types of information was reported to be provided. The most frequently mentioned were (number of institutions in brackets):

- ♦ advice/guidance (24);
- ♦ updates/circulars/ newsletters (23);
- ♦ university widening participation policy/strategy/targets (13);
- ♦ workshops/seminars/conferences (8); and
- ♦ statistical information (6).

More than one type of information was often mentioned, for example:

*Articles in university newsletter. Widening participation strategy and annual operating statement. First widening participation publication for staff is currently in progress.*

*University strategy and targets; admissions statistics giving progress on categories of widening participation students; regular newsletters; information on funding available to bid for.*

#### **4.7 Opportunity Bursary Scheme**

Respondents were asked when they informed applicants from EiC and statutory EAZ areas about Opportunity Bursaries. Sixty-one per cent (34) reported that applicants were informed about the Opportunity Bursary scheme when an offer was made at their institution and 48 per cent (27) informed applicants when an offer was accepted; 21 per cent of respondents (12) reported informing applicants at both stages. Twenty-three per cent of respondents (13) gave other responses including informing students at open days and presentations; one respondent noted that: *'All entrants notified as EiC/EAZ schools lists are available'*.

Respondents were asked how decisions were made about the individuals to whom Opportunity Bursaries should be awarded; their responses were categorised and are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Decisions as to who is awarded an Opportunity Bursary**

<b>How decisions made...</b>	<b>Number of institutions</b>	<b>%</b>
Against set criteria	37	66
Committee/panel of key individuals	15	27
Financial/means tested	10	18
Analysed by relevant officers	10	18
Social circumstances/priority	9	16
First-come-first-served	6	11
Other (e.g. all eligible applicants)	9	16
No response	3	5

**N = 56**

*More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 56.*

Sixty-six per cent (37) of respondents specifically stated that they made their decisions about awarding Opportunity Bursaries against set criteria, as outlined by HEFCE or the DfES, whilst others gave more detailed responses (not specifically mentioning the set criteria). Indeed, it is interesting to note how institutions differentiated between eligible applicants in allocating their bursaries – a range of approaches were used including the use of a committee or panel of some kind (mentioned by 27 per cent of respondents (15)) or analysis of the applications by relevant officers (18 per cent of respondents (10)). Eleven per cent of respondents (6) specifically mentioned using a ‘first-come-first-served’ basis (see **Annex E**).

Half of the respondents (28) felt that it was still too early to comment on whether Opportunity Bursaries had been successful in encouraging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education. However, 27 per cent (15) felt that it had been broadly successful, and 13 per cent (7) that it had been broadly unsuccessful (11 per cent (6) did not know).

Forty-three per cent of the respondents (24) did not report any problems associated with who should be awarded an Opportunity Bursary, 54 per cent (30) felt that there had been problems; four broad themes emerged: high demand for Opportunity Bursaries and limited supply; unfairness (e.g. restrictions to particular areas); concerns about clarity of guidance; and the administration of Opportunity Bursaries.

Thirty per cent of respondents (17) expressed concern about the limited number of Opportunity Bursaries available; for example, one noted that there was not ‘*enough money for all eligible candidates to receive a Bursary*’ and that the scheme had ‘*raised*

*expectations of most disadvantaged groups who are then disappointed*'. Fourteen per cent (8) felt that the scheme was unfair - one respondent noted that some students more in need were not awarded the bursary because of *'their postcode'*. In a similar vein another noted that the *'whole scheme is inherently unfair. All students who meet the criteria should have access to an [Opportunity Bursary] not just those who happen to live in a particular area'*. One respondent summed up the situation thus:

*It is extraordinarily difficult to differentiate between applicants, all of whom fit the criteria laid down by the DfES. The system as it stands is inherently unfair, produces another layer of means-testing, imposes more administration on institutions. If this bursary is to fulfil its purpose in encouraging participation in the target groups, it must be available to every eligible student.*

Guidance given about the scheme was also a cause for concern, at least for some. One respondent felt that guidance was needed to deal with *'non-standard household income, e.g. self-employed or living on capital holding'*. Finally, in relation to the general administration of the Opportunity Bursary scheme, two respondents comments make particular reference to LEAs (see also **Section 5.2**):

*Juggling was involved since some students did not have their LEA assessments even by October and one could not therefore confirm if they met the eligibility requirement to be on maximum loan and have fees paid.*

*The administering of the scheme would sit far easier with the LEAs when tracking successful applicants that subsequently take up higher education at different institutions, or transfer to another university mid-year.*

#### **4.8 Emerging issues: views about the Excellence Challenge Policy**

Respondents were given the opportunity to make additional comments about the Excellence Challenge programme. Just under half of the respondents (45 per cent) gave comments about the Policy. Several broad themes emerged relating to: cooperation, impact, inequality, funding and the role of schools.

Some respondents felt that the programme was already improving **cooperation** with schools, colleges and LEAs:

*Improved contacts with schools and colleges and LEAs, allowing us to develop links where few previously existed – also to work with 11 to 16 schools and with gifted and talented coordinators developing programmes for their students.*

In a similar vein another noted that the importance of the programme lay in the ‘dialogue opening up with local schools and its contribution to relationship building’. However, as noted by one respondent it was also felt to be ‘*important to build on existing good practice in a coherent, consistent way*’. It was noted that in the region concerned ‘*all Excellence Challenge Partnerships try to avoid duplication of effort. Key issue of encouraging schools etc. to see existing work as part of [Excellence Challenge] in an integrated way*’.

Another respondent felt that the programme was already having an **impact** on the target group:

*We feel the move towards this collaborative approach which facilitates partnership working is a step in the right direction. The work we are doing is extremely valued both internally and externally and although true, scientific evaluation of the impact is not yet available, we all feel it is having an impact upon the target audience.*

By way of contrast, one respondent felt that the programme had not had much impact on their widening participation activities: ‘*It has not had a great effect on us. Local schools want to use the money to raise standards, not buy in ‘add ons’ in the form of university activity*’.

There was also some concern about the need to address **inequality**:

*The policy is a good idea but not well thought through. It is too instrumental in approach and doesn’t address the deeper issues of inequality. It is still ‘cherry picking’ the best rather than fundamentally changing the status quo. Providing **adequate** financial resources, awards not loans, has been shown to make the difference (e.g. EMAs [Education Maintenance Allowances]). We need to use the evidence rather than ignore it.*

*It needs reviewing and extending nationally, but needs to deal more comprehensively with issues of social exclusion rather than just creaming off the brightest.*

Some contrasting concerns about **funding** were also raised; one comment expressed concern about future funding, in particular for certain types of university:

*Significant concern about future funding for these activities once Excellence Challenge funding ceases. We would also like to see more funding for national widening participation for Russell Group type universities who do not just recruit locally. Student financial support remains the crucial issue despite all these initiatives and will be the key to successful widening participation.*

Whilst another respondent, from a post-1992 university commented:

*It is a pity that the Excellence Challenge is stimulating the activities of 'traditional' universities in widening participation at the expense of those institutions who have been working in this field for a number of years.*

A number of comments were also made about **schools** and the Excellence Challenge programme; one respondent reported being 'fully supportive' of the programme, but felt that 'outreach projects should begin at a lower age. Primary schools should be involved'. Another respondent believed that the 'role of schools in the initiative makes it more effective than HEI-led initiatives in widening participation'. However, there was not agreement about this as another respondent reported 'excellent links' with the LEAs it worked with '**but** school staff seem completely overwhelmed to cope with their end of the initiative – even though funding is available to release them, there is no-one spare to do the coordination in some schools'.

## **5. SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Summary**

This report highlights key findings to emerge from the survey of higher education institutions carried out in the Spring Term 2002. It is designed to provide a broad overview of widening participation activities underway and not to measure the impact of these activities on recruitment or retention of students.

Amongst the main findings were that summer schools were the outreach activity most frequently offered or planned by higher education institutions during 2001/02 (mentioned by 96 per cent of respondents). Summer schools had been introduced between 1994 and 2002 and in a significant minority of cases respondents reported that their introduction was a result of the Excellence Challenge programme.

Collaboration with not only schools and further education sector colleges, but also with other higher education institutions, was reported by a majority of respondents. Whilst in most institutions (86 per cent), widening participation staff were in post before 2001/02, many institutions (79 per cent) had recruited additional staff in 2001/02. These included academic/academic-related staff, outreach staff, administrative and clerical staff.

A majority of respondents (63 per cent), reported that special admissions strategies had been adopted for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although these varied, they tended to involve seeking additional background information, compact schemes and, in some cases, lower 'offers' for places. These strategies had been introduced, in the main, as a result of the university's own initiative or as a result of the HEFCE widening participation initiative.

In terms of factors taken into account in the recruitment process, recommendations from schools/colleges with which the institution had links, and compacts with schools/colleges/LEAs were mentioned most frequently. Forty-six per cent of the respondents reported that in their view the institution's widening participation initiative had had an impact in terms of increased applications (34 per cent did not know, 9 per cent reported that it had not had an impact and 11 per cent did not respond).

Turning to support strategies, the majority of respondents (73 per cent) reported that they had special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The focus of these strategies was most often on study skills workshops/support, tutoring and

mentoring. The main reasons given for these strategies having been introduced were a university initiative and the HEFCE widening participation initiative.

The majority of respondents (82 per cent) reported that their institution carried out monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities. The most frequently mentioned approaches were reports to a widening participation strategy group (or equivalent); analysis of recruitment/retention data and the institutional action plan. The majority of respondents reported that information on widening participation was disseminated to departments.

The Opportunity Bursary scheme was administered in somewhat different ways by different institutions. Fifty-four per cent of the respondents reported problems associated with deciding who should be awarded an Opportunity Bursary. Key concerns were, high demand and a limited supply of Bursaries; unfairness of the scheme in terms of restricting Bursaries to students from particular areas; the nature of the guidance provided; and the administration of the scheme.

Views about the Excellence Challenge programme were varied (see also HECG & NCSR, 2003). Broadly positive comments relating to improved cooperation were expressed by some respondents but it was also felt that there was a need to address inequality.

## **5.2 Policy Implications**

Although the Excellence Challenge programme has only been operational since September 2001, there are a number of implications for policy that arise from this survey of higher education providers:

- ♦ One widening participation activity which was reported to have been introduced as a result of Excellence Challenge by 35 per cent of respondents was the summer schools scheme. The funding for the Excellence Challenge summer schools scheme is hypothecated, suggesting that earmarking funds for certain activities would be a way to directly influence practice in higher education institutions.<sup>17</sup>
- ♦ In 82 per cent of institutions, monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities were reported. However, a considerably smaller proportion of respondents (11 per cent) specifically mentioned monitoring the participation and progress of students. Wherever practicable, this should take place, in order for departments and institutions to try and establish how effective different types of activities are in

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<sup>17</sup> This could be of significance if certain activities were shown to be more effective than others in terms of increasing widening participation.

terms of enhancing widening participation. This may be particularly important for certain types of outreach (e.g. summer schools) where an impact on recruitment might be expected.

- ◆ There was a suggestion that some schools may not have the capacity to respond to the Excellence Challenge programme. Local partnerships may be able to facilitate the provision of a range of centrally coordinated activities, thus reducing the burden on schools, and so fostering stronger and more effective links between schools and higher education institutions.
- ◆ There was a concern about the restriction of the Opportunity Bursary scheme to certain areas and in particular to a *'postcode'* lottery. This could be addressed by expanding the scheme across the country to all young people in the target group.<sup>18</sup> Given that there are many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who live outside Excellence Challenge areas, this, it can be argued, would be a more equitable approach than the current approach. The re-introduction of student grants from autumn 2004 will address this issue (DfES, 2003c).

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<sup>18</sup> For example, from low income families, with no experience of higher education (although the latter would be harder to verify, for purposes of audit, than the former).

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## ANNEX A AIMS OF EXCELLENCE CHALLENGE

**Figure A1. Aims and Objectives of Excellence Challenge**

The overall aim of the Excellence Challenge is to increase and widen participation in higher education among young people.

[An increase in participation of young people shall be measured by an increase in the initial entry rate of 18, 19 and 20 year olds; a widening of participation of young people shall be measured by an increase in the percentage of young full-time undergraduates from under-represented groups in higher education as expressed through HEFCE performance indicators.]

The Excellence Challenge programme comprises several strands. Each individual strand has its own aims and objectives. All strands contribute to the overall objective.

The aims of **Strand One** are to:

- ♦ increase the numbers of young people from relatively deprived areas entering higher education;
- ♦ build on the EiC programme by extending the Gifted and Talented programme to include 16 to 19 year olds (so that the proportion of young people from these areas progressing to universities with the most demanding entry requirements increases, contributing to HEFCE's 'Fair Access' targets.)
- ♦ improve links between higher education, further education sector colleges and schools.

The aims of **Strand Two** are to:

- ♦ Encourage institutions to widen participation in higher education by under-represented groups
- ♦ Raise the aspirations of all to attend the institution that is best able to match their abilities, interests and needs.
- ♦ Ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies.

The aim of **Strand Three** is to:

- ♦ Under the banner brand of Aimhigher to provide clearer information (including information about the financial support available), and better marketing of the route to and benefits of higher education, particularly focusing on reaching families and communities who do not have a tradition of entering higher education and as a result, raising the expectations of students and teachers alike.

The aim of **Strand Four** is to:

- ♦ To provide a financial incentive for pupils from low income families with little or no family experience of higher education, to increase the numbers of students entering higher education from lower socio-economic groups, contribute towards meeting the 50 per cent participation target; and help improve retention rates.

*Source: Adapted from DfES (2003a)*

## **ANNEX B WIDENING PARTICIPATION FUNDING AND HEFCE** **(Excerpts from Xavier and West, 2003)**

The Higher Education Funding Council for England is responsible for distributing funds on behalf of the government to higher education institutions and further education sector colleges providing higher education programmes. HEFCE's involvement in widening participation predates the Excellence Challenge programme (Lewis, 2002) and, crucially, certain elements of the Excellence Challenge programme also build on many of these initiatives.

In addition to **core funding**, HEFCE provides **additional funding** related to types of students, actual numbers of students from specific groups and for special programmes. HEFCE provides funding supplements for institutions when they recruit particular types of students, namely, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with disabilities, in recognition of the additional costs of providing for these students. The '**postcode premium**' introduced in 1999-2000 allocates additional funding in respect of students from areas with lower than average rates of higher education participation. This is in recognition of additional costs involved in teaching these students (HEFCE, 2002e). Additional funding is also allocated when institutions recruit **students with disabilities**, in recognition of the additional costs of supporting them. The amount institutions receive was initially calculated on the basis of the number of full-time, new entrant, undergraduates in receipt of the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) (Lewis, 2002). However, it is now allocated according to all year data, and to part-time and postgraduate students, since the DSA was extended to these groups (HEFCE, 2002e).

As part of the teaching funds provided to higher education institutions, HEFCE has attached 'premiums' for **part-time and mature students** since 1998-99, again in recognition of the additional costs of providing for these students (Lewis, 2002). This funding stream operates slightly differently to the 'funding supplements' mentioned earlier. These 'premiums' provide institutions with additional money as part of their main grant allocation (Lewis, 2002).

HEFCE also uses the allocation of funding for **additional student numbers** to promote widening participation. HEFCE gives priority to bids which aim to widen access, by for example, 'increasing the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or increasing the range of options in a region', or to those supporting 'bridging activities' to help students prepare for higher education, using, for example summer schools (HEFCE, 2000; Lewis, 2002). From 2001-02, HEFCE has been allocating 'additional student numbers' specifically for new foundation degree programmes<sup>19</sup> (Lewis, 2002).

HEFCE also provides special funding to facilitate **regional partnerships** between higher education institutions, schools and the community (HEFCE, 2000). The aim of this funding stream is to improve the progression rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education and to disseminate and embed good practice (HEFCE, 1999). Further special programmes have also been introduced, led by higher education institutions, further education institutions and lifelong learning partnerships, to 'improve pathways from further education to higher education for disadvantaged

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<sup>19</sup> The aim of these new foundation degrees is that they will appeal to students who may not have considered higher education, as they offer more flexibility, are provided locally and have a more vocational content (see Lewis, 2002).

groups' (Lewis, 2002) funded by HEFCE and the Further Education Funding Council (now the Learning and Skills Council). HEFCE has also attempted to improve provision for disabled students through different projects from 1993 (see Lewis, 2002).

The DfES funds a range of different initiatives aimed at improving access to higher education, which are managed and administered by HEFCE. The DfES **summer school** is one such initiative. This was originally funded via the Excellence in Cities (EiC) Policy, but from 2001-02 it was brought under the remit of the Excellence Challenge programme.

Another initiative is the Excellence Fellowships Awards. During 2002-03 and 2003-04, the DfES is piloting these in designated EiC and statutory EAZ areas (HEFCE, 2002c). The scheme enables teachers in both schools and further education sector colleges to spend time working and studying in a higher education institution, examining ways they can raise the aspirations of their students and increase their understanding of the benefits of higher education (HEFCE, 2002c).

In recognition of the increased risk that students from disadvantaged backgrounds face in terms of non-completion, HEFCE also distributes DfES resources from the government to reduce financial hardship. These funds are distributed to institutions in the form of **hardship funds and mature student bursaries** (in 2001-02, the total amount was around £67 million) and **fee waiver schemes** (approximately £14 million in 2001-02) (HEFCE, 2000; HEFCE 2001d).

Higher education providers receive money from Excellence Challenge through two strands, **Strand Two** and **Strand Four**. Under **Strand Two**, they receive additional funding to support activities to widen and increase participation in higher education. **Strand Four** funding on the other hand, has been directed towards a new form of financial support, known as Opportunity Bursaries. Each of these strands is outlined below.

Between 2001-02 and 2003-04, £60 million is being distributed (under **Strand Two**) to universities and higher education providers through HEFCE to enable institutions to 'reach out to more young people from poorer backgrounds' (DfES, 2002a). This £60 million has been split into three funding streams: the postcode premium, the aspiration premium and the summer school scheme. Both the postcode premium and the summer school scheme were pre-existing HEFCE funded initiatives, which Excellence Challenge is now supporting through **additional** resources.

Through Excellence Challenge an additional £10 million a year for each of three years (2001-02 to 2003-04) is being allocated through the HEFCE **postcode premium** (which is also known as the **widening participation allocation**) to institutions (DfES, 2002a), in direct proportion to their success in recruiting students (young full-time, and part-time undergraduates) from areas with low rates of participation in higher education (HEFCE, 2001a). This funding 'is intended to recognise the success of institutions in recruiting disadvantaged students, and also the extra costs of enabling them to succeed' (HEFCE, 2001a). Institutions have been encouraged to build on the geographical areas where they were already operating successfully. However, HEFCE also asked that where appropriate, institutions should use the additional funds allocated via Excellence Challenge to network specifically with EiC Partnerships in their areas. It should be

noted however, that this funding is **not** limited to work in designated EiC or statutory EAZ areas (HEFCE, 2001a).

The **aspiration premium** is a new funding stream under Excellence Challenge providing £6 million a year for each of three years (2001-02 to 2003-04), which is designed to support outreach work to raise the aspirations of state educated pupils (primarily – but not necessarily – in EiC and statutory EAZ areas), ‘to attend the institution from which they will derive maximum benefit’ (HEFCE, 2000). This funding is only provided to institutions with an intake of less than 80 per cent of students from state schools and further education sector colleges. The level of funding allocated to institutions will also be ‘in proportion to their distance from the 80 per cent threshold, and the size of the state educated cohort’ (HEFCE, 2001a). This ensures that those with fewer state educated students will receive a larger allocation than those closer to the 80 per cent threshold.

The third funding stream relates specifically to the higher education **summer schools** initiative, which started in 1999-2000 as part of the EiC initiative. In 2001-02, it came under the remit of Excellence Challenge. Each year, £4 million is to be allocated to support the summer schools programme for students in Years 11 and 12 from state schools and further education sector colleges in Excellence Challenge areas (i.e. EiC areas and statutory Education Action Zones). The scheme aims to give students a taste of university/college life for one week, and in particular, to encourage students from families and educational backgrounds who may not usually consider higher education, to apply for higher education programmes and also to consider a wider range of institutions and or subjects (HEFCE, 2001a).

A key element of the Excellence Challenge programme is the provision of **Opportunity Bursaries** to offer financial support for students from ‘low income families with little or no experience of higher education, who may lack confidence to apply’ (DfES, 2002a).

Funding for Opportunity Bursaries is paid to higher education providers by HEFCE, via the Access Bursary Fund. The number of bursaries available to each institution is in proportion to their number of full-time students from areas with low rates of participation (HEFCE, 2000). However no institution receives fewer than 10 bursaries. A key feature of the Opportunity Bursary scheme is that once a bursary has been awarded to a student, the funding is then guaranteed to the student **regardless** of where she or he eventually takes up a place in higher education (DfES, 2002c). The funding ‘belongs’ to the student (rather than the institution) and ‘follows’ him or her; thus, the student still receives the bursary even if it has been awarded by a particular institution, and the student subsequently commences a higher education programme elsewhere.

A limited degree of funding has also been provided since the introduction of Excellence Challenge to cover the promotion and administration of individual financial support (including hardship, fee waiver and Opportunity Bursary funds) (HEFCE, 2000).

## ANNEX C REPRESENTATIVENESS OF SAMPLE

**Table C1. Comparison of pre-1992 institutions 2000-01 in England and in survey**

<b>Performance indicators</b>	<b>Pre-1992 institutions Mean (N=45)</b>	<b>Survey pre-1992 institutions Mean (N=24)</b>
Total entrants	2233	2611
Number young entrants	1893	2264
% young entrants	84	86
% with known data from state schools	90	92
% from state schools	77	73
State school/college benchmark	80	78
State school/college location adjusted benchmark	78	76
% with known data from manual social classes	91	93
% from manual social classes	19	18

*Source: HEFCE (2002f)*

**Table C2. Comparison of post-1992 institutions 2000-01 in England and in survey**

<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>Post-1992 institutions Mean (N=69)</b>	<b>Survey post-1992 institutions Mean (N=28)</b>
Total entrants	2427	2721
Number young entrants	1628	1834
% young entrants	69	69
% with known data from state schools	73	71
% from state schools	95	94
State school/college benchmark	93	93
State school/college location adjusted benchmark	93	92
% with known data from manual social classes	77	75
% from manual social classes	32	32

*Source: HEFCE (2002f)*

## ANNEX D ADMISSIONS STRATEGIES

**Figure D1. Examples of admissions strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds**

- ♦ A highly successful admission compact scheme operates with 45 partner schools and further education colleges, which, in addition to guaranteeing a standard offer, provides extensive pre-entry support and guidance to potential students and their parents. A package of preparation workshops, visits, associate reader status at the library and financial guidance for students and parents (including a compact bursary) ensure that students are well matched for their chosen study programme and have positively affected non-completion rates. Over 420 'first generation' students applied to the university through this route for entry 2002.
- ♦ University policy to advertise entry requirements as a range i.e. 180 to 240 UCAS tariff points and to tailor offers according to ability of applicants within the band...publication of requirements for a range of UK qualifications including Access; widely applied Compact agreement for regionally-based applicants...
- ♦ Flexible admissions were piloted for the 2001 round of admissions. Half of the university's schools participated. In 2002, 30 out of 32 participated. Flexible admissions allows admissions tutors to pay particular attention to contextual factors.
- ♦ Forty places split between all departments for applicants whose grades would not normally be deemed 'offer worthy' due to some identifiable disadvantage suffered.
- ♦ [A special programme involving] all departments/schools for 2003 entry (but five for 2002). Special offer for eligible candidates which is six 'points' lower than normal, and attendance at an 'assessed' summer school. Involves 45 schools and seven FE colleges.

## ANNEX E OPPORTUNITY BURSARY DECISIONS

**Figure E1. Examples of how Opportunity Bursary decisions were made**

- ♦ First-come-first served basis using criteria defined by DfES: income, location, family experience of higher education. If a student meets the basic criteria they are offered a bursary while they remain available.
- ♦ Decisions based on HEFCE criteria; allocations group makes final decision about who receives bursaries.
- ♦ A combination of DfES/HEFCE criteria and additional criteria required. Needed to establish those with the greatest need.
- ♦ In 2001/02, we received (quite late into the session) information about Opportunity Bursaries. We had been allocated 11. We received well over 100 applications even though not all undergraduate applicants had received Opportunity Bursary information. Each one of the applications was considered carefully by financial support and widening participation staff. The most deserving were ranked and finally 11 selected in the main from Excellence in Cities areas.

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