



Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG)

Response of the HEDG Planning Group

White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System: Consulting on the future of Higher Education'

1. The **Heads of Educational Development Group** (<http://www.hedg.ac.uk>) represents senior institutional leaders with a direct responsibility for learning and teaching enhancement at 94 Higher Education Institutions in the UK. HEDG members have in common their responsibility for informing institutional strategy and vision and translating it into academic practice. This may be through academic staff development, educational innovation projects, Postgraduate programmes for new or experienced staff, curriculum development and research projects, or through their contributions to committees, advice and guidance work, regional networks and through many other routes. At the same time, HEDG members tend to be those people on institutional boards and committees who bring the voice of academic practice to the consideration of strategy makers and policy setters. This response has been formulated by the executive Planning Group of HEDG.

General response

2. In general terms HEDG welcomes the White Paper for supporting the need to '*restore teaching to its proper position, at the centre of every higher education institution's mission (para 2.7 p27)*' and for stating that the student experience is '*at the heart of the system*'. Where the White Paper proposes appropriate processes for enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, HEDG believes it has a supportive contribution to make.
3. In relation to HEDG's mission, there needs to be clear recognition of the importance of educational leadership for learning and teaching both through central units and within faculties/disciplines etc. There needs to be greater emphasis on promotion opportunities for educational leadership and a general understanding that much needs to be done to achieve parity of recognition and esteem between education and research leadership at all levels. The White Paper could take the opportunity to stress this and to ensure that HEIs demonstrate their commitment to these principles.

The Quality of Student Information

4. The White Paper stresses the need for improved access to better information for prospective students and HEDG supports this approach providing the data is provided in a contextualized form and avoids an overemphasis on overly generalised quantitative measures.
5. Specifically, provision of information about **teaching quality** is vitally important but we are aware that using teaching qualifications as a sole indication for teaching quality can be misleading. This is a particularly contentious issue which our members have discussed on

several occasions. We have concerns about the quality and accuracy of the qualification data available and the limitations imposed by over-emphasising data from one source - the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). A range of valid educational qualifications should be included (eg Academy of Medical Educators; PGCE; MEd/BEd etc) alongside a wider range of data and 'rich' qualitative evidence from students and external accreditors (QAA; Professional bodies) in providing key information about quality. We find it remarkable that in this context, student views are not at all considered as a valid indicator of teaching quality and suggest that they be included. In any case, the emphasis should be on making this information easily accessible to prospective students and other stakeholders. It is also important that current and recently graduated students have the opportunity to interact with their HEIs in validating the authenticity of the information that is provided.

Professional training for teachers

6. Most **staff and postgraduate students new to teaching** undertake a professional training programme of some sort. It can be argued that the practice of accredited professional development for teaching and supporting learning has become so widely adopted in HEIs that it is a common standard. A key challenge is ensuring that the professional development of **established staff** and those who take on **leadership roles** in higher education is prioritised. HEDG would like to see this addressed in the White Paper. The Higher Education Academy (HEA), Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), and other professional bodies and associations, have a good record of developing appropriate resources and processes supporting professional development in learning and teaching for experienced staff. The real challenge is encouraging the wider uptake of these opportunities by those who teach. Adoption of appropriate University policies and promotion related incentives should be emphasised in the White Paper (see below).
7. In that context HEDG expresses its regret at the closure of so many HEA Subject Centres and the potential impact, precisely at the point where teaching in the disciplines is undergoing dramatic change in the face of changing student expectations. Subject teachers will be looking for teaching guidance and opportunities to compare teaching practices with peers and take part in the development of innovative teaching practices. It is more important now than ever that there continues to be space for exchange, learning and collaboration on teaching.

Promotion routes for academics in relation to teaching

8. HEDG has concerns that the promotion routes for academics fail to give parity to expertise in teaching and research. HEIs should be expected to provide evidence to stakeholders that teaching is clearly recognized in promotion and in internal award systems, both in the criteria and the impact of these systems. The White Paper might usefully address the status of the teaching fellow within the range of academic roles, and request UUK to strengthen their responsibility for the implementation of the UK Professional Standards Framework by policy steering on promotion and teaching recognition within the academic career structure.

Student Engagement

- 9 HEDG welcomes the emphasis of the White Paper on the central role of students in Higher Education. In the narrower sense of learning and teaching (as opposed to the wider student experience), we support an emphasis on student engagement in educational development, and a co-ownership of educational processes by staff and students in the classroom. HEDG supports the White Paper's expectations on the QAA to ensure student engagement is

appropriately and robustly addressed in all HEIs. However, whilst the QAA takes on a role of monitoring practice and providing public judgements, we believe that the White Paper could have gone further and sought to suggest student empowerment by promoting governance change, revised student representation processes and an emphasis on the *informed* student voice, rather than the collective voice of individual students expressing 'satisfaction' (NSS, SU surveys for KIS purposes). The difference in the student engagement approach as opposed to student satisfaction approach lies not just in the relevance of the quality of teaching indicators (teaching quality or satisfaction) for prospective students but, more importantly, sets either a tone of consumerism or student centred learning for HE. With our membership coming from a strong educational practice and research background, we are convinced that the engagement agenda ultimately allows HE to make a stronger contribution to society, than will the consumer satisfaction agenda alone. We would welcome a stronger stance on this issue in forthcoming policy.

Funding development and student support in a changing sector

10 HEDG believes that it is important to consider the White Paper in the wider context of the HEFCE Teaching Funding and Student Numbers consultation paper. We note and understand the government's intention to lessen strategy driven funding policy. However, to withdraw funding (TESS) for education innovation/strategies at the moment when the White Paper is taking the view that teaching and students are at the heart of HE planning appears at least counter intuitive. The White Paper should have acknowledged instead that continued funding is needed to maintain HEI's ability to enhance and develop teaching and (academic) support to students. With this in mind, BIS should ask the HEFCE to revisit this decision or replace this funding in an alternative way.

Unintended market consequences

11 HEDG notes with regret that the competitive underpinnings of the White Paper may well lead to unintended consequences. Competitive environments created by market parameters do not encourage the high quality educational engagements within and between institutions which have consistently enabled a climate of continuous improvement. We note with some concern that the White Paper may encourage an audit culture (typically led by the QAA) with a reduction in the enhancement culture which has steadily helped improve the quality of student experiences in the past.

Contact hours

12 HEDG believe that the sector's concerns about the use of contact hours as an indication of teaching quality are well documented. HEDG supports other stakeholders in the sector in objecting to this indicator in the strongest terms. Institutions and individual disciplines within them should be empowered to work with students to develop appropriate types and amounts of contact with reference to research evidence on how the balance between contact and interactions of other types can best be achieved. For such discussions of substance it is unhelpful that a performance indicator such as contact hours is introduced. Contact hours in themselves are not an indicator of a quality learning experience. Rather, the emphasis should be on learning and teaching strategies that promote student engagement and 'time on task'.

In conclusion

As stated, HEDG welcomes the White Paper's emphasis on rebalancing research and teaching interests and for stating that the student experience is '*at the heart of the system*', but notes,

based on years of collective insight into the working of universities and academic communities, that further thought needs to go into the areas addressed above.

HEDG Planning Group
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