

Sector impact assessment

Name of policy/initiative/project:	Strategically important and vulnerable subjects (SIVS): a new policy approach
1. What are the aims of this policy/initiative/project?	<p>To define HEFCE's support for subject provision from 2012-13, in the new student fees and funding system for higher education. This new policy approach includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • moving away from one set list of 'strategically important and vulnerable' subjects (i.e. recognising potential for other subjects to become vulnerable) • monitoring risks to broad subject provision • working with other stakeholders and funders to influence and address issues where this is warranted by the materiality of the risk, combined with the overall strategic importance of the subject area. <p>Any specific interventions to be made under this new policy approach should be the subject of a separate assessment. We anticipate that our interventions will be highly selective.</p>
2. At what stage of the development process is this assessment being undertaken?	<p>This new approach builds on existing SIVS policy and has been informed by discussions with key stakeholders and the current SIVS advisory group. This approach was agreed by the HEFCE Board on 27 January 2012. Elements of the approach are set out in the second teaching funding consultation, which was reported to the Board in July 2012.</p>
3. Do existing data sources enable us to provide evidence of impact? If not, how should we best gather evidence?	<p>Yes. HESA data provides information on the takeup of subjects by students, and this will continue to be the case under the new policy. DLHE data is also used to indicate graduate employment by subject.</p> <p>We do not intend to collect new data under this policy.</p> <p>It should be noted that factors other than HEFCE policy and interventions affect this data, but monitoring subject trends remains critical in understanding the shape of provision across the sector.</p>
Regulatory impact assessment	
4. Will this policy/initiative/project require higher education institutions to perform or commission more work than we already expect from them?	<p>Possibly. Existing data sources (HESA, DLHE) will be used to further inform our understanding of subject provision across the HE sector. If HEFCE's monitoring indicates there may be a need for targeted intervention in a particular area this is likely to result in further work requirements from institutions, for example monitoring of recruitment levels in certain subjects.</p> <p>Any such interventions should be the subject of separate assessments.</p>
5. If so, are the benefits of delivery sufficient to outweigh this regulatory	<p>Yes. The 2010 grant letter and the White Paper (May 2011) gave specific instructions that HEFCE was to take steps to</p>

<p>impact? Describe these benefits.</p>	<p>ensure that strategically important and vulnerable subjects are protected against undesirable reductions in the scale of provision within the new student HE funding and finance system. To enable this, we need a broad understanding of the current shape of provision, the ability to influence the actions of other stakeholders and on occasion make discrete interventions to protect specific subject areas.</p> <p>Any specific targeted interventions will be designed to balance the need to protect subjects with any additional burden this may create for institutions, and should be the subject of separate impact assessments.</p>
<p>6. Please explain with supporting evidence how you have arrived at this judgement.</p>	<p>Since 2005 HEFCE has invested over £350 million in a programme of interventions that seek to secure the continued availability of SIVS subjects. The programme recognised that the dynamism of the English HE sector is a great strength and interventions thus were kept to a minimum.</p> <p>An evaluation of our programme of work to support SIVS¹ confirmed that HEFCE has exercised leadership without any heavy-handed market interference and minimal burden to the HE sector.</p> <p>As per question 5, any new interventions considered necessary will be designed to balance the need to protect subjects with the additional burden this will create for institutions, and should be the subject of separate impact assessments.</p>
<p>Equality and diversity</p>	
<p>7. Which of the people with the protected characteristics specified in the 2010 Equality Act are likely to be affected by this policy/initiative/project, and how?</p>	<p>This policy is about monitoring and assessing the shape of subject provision across the sector. This will not have a direct bearing on people with protected characteristics.</p> <p>However, we recognise that there may be a concentration of people with protected characteristics in either the delivery of HE programmes, or students on courses in certain subjects or disciplines. For example, women and some ethnic groups are likely to be under-represented among academic staff in STEM subjects, and a higher concentration of ethnic minority lecturers in minority language teaching.</p> <p>Protection of certain vulnerable subjects, such as modern foreign languages, will have a positive impact on culture and society, enabling greater understanding and open mindedness of other cultures and societies. Maintaining a wide range of subjects across curricula ensures diversity of the HE sector.</p> <p>This new policy will undertake to better understand what the picture of provision is like for people with protected characteristics.</p>

¹ www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2011/rd05_11/

<p>8. What evidence have you used to ascertain whether there will be an impact (or not) on these people?</p>	<p>HESA cost centre data presented in the 2010-11 SIVS Advisory Group report² noted a decline in some STEM (engineering and mathematics) provision in post-1992 HEIs. Students in these institutions are more likely than others to be mature, in work, studying locally and from neighbourhoods with a record of low HE participation, suggesting a limit on the diversity, and in some locations the availability, of graduates in these subjects.</p>
<p>9. Which negative impacts have been identified during the development of this policy/project/initiative, and what actions have been taken to mitigate the effect?</p>	<p>This policy is concerned with monitoring and assessing the supply of subject provision across the sector. This will not have a direct bearing on people with protected characteristics.</p> <p>However, we recognise that if the HE reforms result in a concentration of subjects considered strategically important and vulnerable in highly-selective institutions (as a result of cost, restructuring, decline in takeup), there could be a negative impact on the diversity of students studying, or wishing to study these subjects. If subject provision ceases at certain institutions students may need to seek out other HEIs with similar provision. Although this may provide different but not less opportunities (neutral impact) there may be a negative impact in terms of accessibility, in particular for disabled students.</p> <p>It is anticipated there may be a negative impact on the scale and diversity of ongoing activities undertaken by current SIVS investments to widen access to STEM subjects, particularly the National HE STEM programme, once funding has concluded.</p>

² http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2011/11_24/

<p>10. What actions will be taken to ensure that this policy/project/initiative promotes both equality and diversity?</p>	<p>HEFCE is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing an approach to supporting the teaching of the highest cost activity that mitigates the impact of costs on the demand for and supply of this provision in the STEM subjects. • making possible discretionary investments with partner organisations to address specific concerns about the sustainability of these disciplines • working with partner organisations to ensure additionality for the sector as a whole • considering whether the Catalyst Fund could be used to sustain the progress made to current SIVS initiatives (such as South East Physics Network) in stimulating collaboration between universities to raise the demand for and sustainability of these subjects. • continuing support for demand-raising activity in Modern Foreign Languages, in which widening participation is a key objective. <p>When monitoring subject provision under the new policy framework, we will observe any impact upon people with protected characteristics and any further interventions in particular subject areas will be the subject of separate assessments where equality and diversity impact can be considered more fully.</p>
<p>Sustainable development</p>	
<p>11. What are the likely impacts of this policy/ initiative/project on sustainable development? How have you arrived at this judgement?</p>	<p>It is widely acknowledged that sustainable development depends upon an innovative and productive economy. This policy is thus likely to have a positive impact on sustainable development, including enabling HEIs to sustain critical mass in producing highly-trained graduates in low-carbon technologies and smart energy distribution; and supporting their work with businesses and policymakers to find new solutions to environmental challenges such as pollution, waste management and greenhouse gases.</p>

<p>12. Which negative impacts have been identified during the development of this policy/project/initiative, and what actions have been taken to mitigate the effect?</p>	<p>A loss of subject provision in areas which lead to careers in the environmental sciences (such as in low-carbon energy) would have a negative impact on sustainable development. This would largely be in STEM subjects but there may be other relevant disciplines. Our approach proposes close engagement with stakeholders and other funders which we anticipate, when combined with data, would give us early indication of lack of availability of suitably qualified graduates.</p> <p>This policy is designed to oversee the health of all subjects in the English HE system, and to evaluate the need to take further action if any discipline linked to research expertise or careers in sustainable development were to become vulnerable. At this point we would need to consider the need to make a specific intervention. HEIs should also be empowered to determine and manage their own social and economic impacts.</p> <p>The extent to which we could influence the reversal of any such decline in provision would be dependent on the funding available to us, and the relative priority of these particular subject areas when compared to others that may also be at risk.</p>
<p>13. What actions will be taken to ensure that this policy/project/initiative promotes sustainable development?</p>	<p>None at this stage – if any subject-related interventions are made we will assess whether it is possible to promote sustainable development as part of these.</p>
<p>Privacy impact assessments</p>	
<p>14. Will you be using information or data about individuals?</p>	<p>Yes (HESA, ILR, DLHE)</p> <p>Additionally, we might in the future use UCAS data and information from the National Pupil Database (subject to further discussion with the holders of these data sources)</p> <p>Any further interventions in particular subject areas will be the subject of separate impact assessments, and the need for a full privacy impact assessment will also be considered at this time.</p>
<p>15. Will you be combining or matching data about individuals with data from other sources?</p>	<p>Yes – to understand the flows of students through the education system.</p>
<p>16. Will you be sharing data about individuals with third parties (such as consultants, other funding bodies)?</p>	<p>Potentially – not planned at this stage.</p> <p>Any data published would be anonymised.</p>

Certification by Director

This is a fair assessment of the impact of this policy/initiative/project on the higher education sector, taking into account the regulatory burden imposed. The policy/initiative/project has been appropriately designed to meet our equality, regulatory and privacy obligations as well as promote equality and diversity and sustainable development. This assessment is ready for publication.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. M. L.', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Date 23/04/2013