



HEFCE Consultation on allocation method for postgraduate research funding from 2012-13

Sector impact assessment of QR research funding and RDP supervision funding

Consultation question 1:

Do you agree that for 2012-13 we should increase the value of the RDP supervision fund, by up to £35 million?

Consultation question 2:

Which of the options we have described for linking the allocation of RDP supervision funding to quality (a threshold, or a quality weighting) best meets our aim of encouraging the supervision of students in higher-quality research environments? Why?

Consultation question 3:

If we used a quality score, as described in paragraph 22, to achieve differentiation by quality does a ratio of 1:2 seem appropriate?

Consultation question 4:

Do you consider that the value of an institution's RDP grant relative to its mainstream QR grant provides a useful indicator of the sustainability of postgraduate supervisory activity at whole-institution level?

- 1 GuildHE / CREST would support the proposal to increase the value of the RDP supervision fund.
- 2 The quality of a research environment is not dictated by scale; hence, the emphasis on quality weighting as opposed to thresholds is preferable. We recognise that there is significant variation in the ratio of RDP funding to mainstream QR, but we could not support a proposal to introduce a threshold without more information on where the threshold would be set.
- 3 However, increasing access to research degrees is an issue linked to widening participating, an area that GuildHE and CREST institutions excel at. Both options appear to concentrate RDP funding further on a small number of institutions, meaning that research students from diverse backgrounds undertaking degrees at regional, small and specialist Higher Education institutions (HEIs) will not have access to support.
- 4 RDP funding provided by HEFCE has traditionally been allocated on a relatively diverse scale, thereby supporting access; particularly considering the concentration of research funds undertaken by the Research Councils, we appreciate HEFCE's stated intention to 'ensure that postgraduate students are supervised in high quality, stimulating and

sustainable research environments'. This fits with HEFCE's position that it is committed to funding quality research wherever it is found.

- 5 GuildHE requests that HEFCE also publicly acknowledge that the quality of the research environment is not linked to the size of the HEI. Researchers in regional and specialist institutions supervise students working in key sectors, including food security, education and the creative industries; the research culture of these sectors is complex and well-served by HEIs and postgraduate research students (PGRs) who may lose funding under the new scheme, despite demands from these sectors for skilled postgraduates.
- 6 Access to comprehensive, hands-on supervision is vital to the research student experience and the quality of the research environment; over-emphasis on the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) or, in the future, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) ignores the importance of this relationship to the quality of research degree provision, as the RAE is not a measure of the quality of supervision, but is a measure of the quality of the research outputs of potential supervisors.
- 7 Quality research *and* teaching are vital to producing high-level postgraduates: the two are intrinsically linked. A funding methodology that avoids further concentration and unintended consequences (particularly in light of the recent changes to RCUK PGR funding), that supports the supervision of young researchers working in key sectors, and recognises the quality of supervision, which relies at least as much on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee as the research outputs of the supervisor, should be the goal of this consultation.
- 8 Investment in networks of expertise providing specialist and interdisciplinary perspectives on research are a potential indicator of a quality research environment. Networks and consortia offer sustainable models for delivering research skills training, support engagement with secondary supervisors across disciplines, and ultimately enhance the quality of research degrees and the PGR experience, which should be at the heart of the funding methodology.
- 9 The incorporation of field-based research, undertaken with industrial partners, impacts upon student employability and the overall success of a research programme, and considering the new emphasis on impact in the REF 2014, including this as part of the RDP criteria could offer a more nuanced and appropriate means of assessing and allocating funding in the future.

