THE RUNNYMEDE TRUST RESPONSE TO

The Higher Education Programme

Consultation for Race Equality Impact Assessment Purposes

31st October 2006

We are pleased to be able to submit our views on the Higher Education Programme Consultation for REIA purposes. We welcome the efforts made through this consultation to engage more widely on this part of DfES policy and commend the authors on the clarity of purpose and clear formatting of the consultation.

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Our mandate is to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain – a Britain where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept a collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging. Runnymede has been active in the field of education for many years. Within our current education programme we devise and promote practical strategies for use in the classroom and, at community level, we aim to address and support the specific needs of minority ethnic young people. Further we focus on identifying, sustaining and augmenting improvements in race equality and social cohesion in the changing terrain of education policy and practice.

We broadly welcome the efforts made in this consultation paper to reflect on the race equality impact of the Higher Education Programme and are supportive of many of the aims and delivery of HE policy as outlined in this paper.
Rather than answer each of the questions posed in the consultation paper, in this short response, we will highlight a few issues which should be considered in improving policy and ensuring improved outcomes in terms of race equality.

It is a disappointment that the consultation paper covers only three strands of the Higher Education Programme. Given that voluntary sector organisations such as Runnymede have a limited amount of resources to expend in responding to consultations, the onus should be on the policymakers to bring their work together rather than depend on those being consulted to respond to numerous concurrent consultations. We hope that in the future there may be some streamlining of the consultation process to enable the broadest possible range of organisations to respond. Indeed in bringing together all of the strands of the programme into one consultation, it may have been possible to draw some conclusions about ways in which the various strands could work more closely together to promote race equality; for example the relationship between widening participation and improving HE/employer links.

A duty to promote race equality and good race relations
The authors are to be commended regarding the thorough manner in which they have addressed many of the issues concerning race equality. However, throughout this analysis they appear to have disregarded the duty that HE policy has in regard to promoting good race relations. The analysis highlights that participation levels are higher than average for most minority ethnic groups. The picture is, however, more complicated than this given that the proportion of students from minority ethnic communities differs widely between institutions. As Polly Curtis pointed out:

The figures on the ethnicity of students at higher education institutions for 2003-04, provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (Hesa), reveal a deeply worrying racial divide among British universities. There are 53 institutions with less than 5% ethnic minority students. About 20 institutions have more than 40%. Some 50 institutions have fewer than five black Caribbean students - and there are 123 institutions in which black Caribbean students make up less than 1% of the student body. Half of the Russell Group have fewer than 30 black Caribbean students each. Meanwhile, of the 11 institutions where white students are in the minority, seven are post-1992 urban universities. Segregation, 2006 style – Polly Curtis, The Guardian 03/01/2006

While the figures may show that people from minority ethnic communities are more likely to enter Higher Education, they are concentrated in certain universities. The pre/post-1992 split does not show quite how stark this divide is. It is of concern for those interested in promoting good race relations as well as race equality that some HEIs are not ethnically diverse.

We have argued elsewhere that ethnic segregation between educational institutions may have an impact on outcomes. Further, the outcome in terms of promoting good race relations (and community cohesion) needs to be considered in terms of developing policy. More research needs to be undertaken not just into the numbers of people attending universities but into the quality of the experience in terms of ethnic diversity and the benefits that this can provide in educating for life.

in a multi-ethnic society. Also, by merely looking at numbers of those attending there is no recognition of the fact that our HEIs are competitive institutions, some receiving greater amounts of spending per capita (Oxford, Cambridge) and with greater resources to expend on teaching and learning. This in turn impacts on employment opportunities on graduation with students from certain institutions more likely to be employed and employed in roles which gain greater monetary reward.

Widening participation
We welcome the efforts made to widen participation to HE and recognise the significant level of work that has gone into the Aim Higher initiative. The concentration merely on numbers of students entering HE, may further exacerbate the ethnic segregation between HEIs. Unless Aim Higher programmes begin to influence the choices of subject and institution of BME pupils it could lead to segregation and ultimately worse outcomes for minority ethnic graduates. Aim Higher should be developing responses which better understand the constraints of the choices that young people from BME backgrounds are making and work to make all HEIs accessible rather than just some.

In point 2.15 it is argues that the collection of ethnicity data ‘could be regarded as unnecessarily burdensome’. The introduction of Pupil Level data should have consigned this excuse to history. The failure to collect this data leaves gaps in our understanding about the HE choices made by BME pupils. Case study data does not allow for regulation or indeed ensure equality of opportunity across the country.

We welcome the move to PQA and think that the impact may be positive for BME pupils. The data on the accuracy of predicted grades highlights the work that needs to be undertaken with teachers to challenge racialised stereotypes and the impact that Aim Higher could contribute to challenging underachievement.

Better student support
The evidence presented points to higher levels of risk aversion among BME students. Again, greater use of qualitative data might highlight the impact of working during degree courses on student achievement. HEFCE research in this area may point to some differential experience based on ethnicity which might be worth considering in thinking about the impact of current student support policies.

We welcome the role of OFFA in ensuring that Access Agreements are in place, though would prefer greater transparency on the terms of these agreements and to see race equality at the forefront of the Office’s work. Many institutions have reached access agreements despite having fewer than ten Black Caribbean students in each intake.

Diverse Higher Education System
We welcome the diversification of the higher education system as long as quality of teaching and learning is maintained. Such diversification could be of great benefit to minority ethnic communities. The provisos mentioned above are important, however, in terms of their duty to

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3 Van Dyke R., Little, B. and Callender, C. Debt, Term-Time Work and Attainment: Higher Education Students’ Attitudes to Debt and Term-Time Working and Their Impact on Attainment, Bristol: HEFCE
promote good race relations and the concerns expressed about ethnic segregation. If existing HEIs see new institutions as replacing their responsibilities to serve the needs of BME students or other underrepresented groups the outcomes will be unsatisfactory.

In conclusion, we welcome the opportunity to engage with this process and look forward to supporting the improvement of race equality and good race relations in the HE sector. We hope that these comments provide a useful contribution to the Further Education consultation process and look forward to reading the full Race Equality Impact Assessment once published.

Yours faithfully,

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Deputy Director