

**Report of Director of Children's Services**

**Report to Executive Board**

**Date: 20 June 2012**

**Subject: Response to the Full Council Deputation by Mark Swards, Leeds University Union: Widening Participation**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

**Summary of main issues**

1. This report provides a response to the deputation presented to Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 entitled "Widening Participation". The report was presented by Mark Swards chair of the board of trustees at Leeds University Union.
2. The full deputation is attached as appendix 1. It highlights the need to maintain a coordinated response to helping ensure that young people in Leeds and particularly those from the poorest households, aren't put off applying to University in the future as a result of the increase in tuition fees. Specifically it calls for a campaign to ensure that parents and teachers have access to the information necessary for them to support young people in making informed choices and understand the long term financial benefits of higher education. It also emphasises that many people may wish to access University later in life and the need to ensure that age is no barrier to higher education.
3. Officers have given consideration to the issues raised and consulted with colleagues in the Universities. The response outlines a number of key measures the Council and Universities are introducing to help remove potential barriers to participating in higher education and ensure that young people are equipped to make informed choice about their future education and career.

4. The full scale of the impact of the downturn to the economy together with changing national funding policy for Higher Education is complex and initial investigations suggest variable affects upon different universities and colleges, individual courses within institutions and differences between groups of potential and existing students e.g. those from lower income households in particular. Further research is proposed in order to analyse the specific impact and what local measures and actions can be taken to address them. Officers will be working closely in the coming months with individual colleges and universities (including staff and student unions) as well as the HE sector as a whole to monitor the impacts upon the city's students, universities and any wider impacts on communities, especially mindful of long term impacts upon the city's economy.

## **Recommendations**

5. Executive Board is recommended to:
  - (i) Support an ongoing dialogue between officers and the universities, in particular through further research into the impact upon Leeds' existing students and younger learners (with the potential to enter higher education) and the completion and success rate of those students enrolled on courses.
  - (ii) Note the range of developments and initiatives to support progression to higher education already put in place
  - (iii) Indicate support for Leeds Education Challenge and the Higher Education Access: Rewarding Transforming (HEART) structures as the most appropriate vehicles to ensure a coordinated approach to support the progression of young people to higher education.
  - (iv) Indicate support for considering this issue as part the work around the Child Friendly City priority to: address the barriers that prevent children and young people from engaging in and enjoying learning.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report provides a response to the deputation presented to Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 entitled "Widening Participation". The report was presented by Mark Swards chair of the board of trustees at Leeds University Union.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 The Executive Board of 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011 considered a deputation led by the Leeds University Union on the changes to the funding of higher education. As a result Executive Board decided that officers should be authorised to engage with the universities and other relevant parties, in order to undertake a piece of work to help understand the impact of the changes for Leeds.
- 2.2 On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012 the report 'Impact of tuition fee rises for Leeds' was presented to Executive Board. The reports main findings were:
- There are differing views from the HEIs in Leeds on the potential impacts on the number of students recruited from 2012. The attractiveness of Leeds as a city is seen as vital selling point in appealing to students.
  - There is evidence to suggest that an increasing number of students may choose to study locally and live at home.
  - Continuing to ensure that students from poorer backgrounds are able to enter into higher education is a key concern.
  - The proposed changes, concerns about wider participation and the potential for increased competition between institutions highlights the need for the City to have a coordinated partnership approach to higher education.
- 2.3 The Executive Board agreed that a further piece of work be commissioned in order to assess the economic impact of tuition fee rises and the wider changes to higher education being implemented post 2012, to be undertaken in 12 months time, with a report being submitted to Executive Board, which also provides further details regarding the involvement of the universities within local communities.
- 2.4 In response to the report to Executive Board on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012, Mark Swards chair of the board of trustees at Leeds University Union presented a deputation to Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 entitled "Widening Participation".

- 2.5 The deputation highlights the need to ensure that with the abolition of Aimhigher we maintain a coordinated response to helping ensure that young people in Leeds and particularly those from the poorest households, aren't put off applying to University in the future as a result of the increase in tuition fees. Specifically it calls for a campaign to ensure that parents and teachers have access to the information necessary for them to support young people in making informed choices and understand the long term financial benefits of higher education. It also emphasises the fact that many people may wish to access University later in life and the need to ensure that age is no barrier to higher education. The full deputation is attached as appendix 1.

### **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 Officers share the concerns expressed in the deputation and are committed to encouraging more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to progress to higher education and are looking to address this issue as part of our overarching strategy to improve performance and participation through Leeds Education Challenge. Leeds Education Challenge provides the framework that brings together the council, schools, FE colleges, universities, business and other key stakeholders with a contribution to make to improving learning outcomes for young people in Leeds. The issues raised also need to be considered as part of our work around the Child Friendly City priority to: address the barriers that prevent children and young people from engaging in and enjoying learning.
- 3.2 If we are to ensure that more young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds progress to higher education then one of the first barriers we must overcome is their relatively low levels of participation and achievement of this cohort in 16-19 learning compared to the population as a whole. As part of the "closing the gap" strand of the Leeds Education Challenge we are embarking on an ambitious campaign to transform the performance and participation in learning of young people from the most disadvantaged background.
- 3.3 Officers will seek to undertake an analysis of the impact of student tuition fees, loss of Aimhigher funding and the impact of the economic downturn on Leeds students especially those from low income backgrounds by working closely with the universities and in particular the student and staff unions. The research will aim to differentiate between the separate universities and colleges where the size of the impact may be significant. The Leeds Education Challenge will begin to develop a coordinated and ongoing approach to researching and addressing the issues outlined around progression to higher education.
- 3.4 One of the first issues we need to address is ensuring young people and their families are clear around the financial situation with regard to higher education. The increase in tuition fees outlined in the deputation is an issue for many families and young people who do not want to get into debt for a range of

reasons. There are, however, misconceptions about the new student finance arrangements amongst teachers, parents and young people who are unclear about the arrangements for repayment. Repayments will not start until former students begin earning more than £21,000, and any outstanding balance will be written off after 30 years. Often there is also a lack of understanding of the financial support available to young people from poorer households through none repayable grants, fee waivers and bursaries.

- 3.5 This lack of clarity amongst young people and parents / carers comes at a time when significant changes are happening to universal careers guidance services. Responsibility for delivering universal Connexions services, previously a duty of the local authority, has been removed. The Education Act 2011 places schools under a new duty to secure independent careers guidance for pupils in years 9 – 11. There is to be a consultation on whether to extend this duty to year 13. Schools have received no additional funding for this work and do face a number of budgetary pressures as a result of changes to funding and the end of a number of grant-funded initiatives.
- 3.6 A new destination measure has been introduced for schools and colleges. DfE will publish, from 2012, figures that show the percentage of students progressing in further learning. This will place schools under greater pressure to ensure they have the right support in place and they will be looking to universities and employers to contribute to the career learning of their students.
- 3.7 The impact of the end of Aimhigher funding means that the local authority no longer has the same level of capacity to become directly involved in co-ordination activities to increase aspiration and widen participation across schools and colleges. As schools and colleges are now having to co-ordinate their own university links there is a danger of an inconsistent picture emerging, where some schools retain an element of the Aimhigher co-ordinator role and others take a more ad-hoc approach. The partnerships between schools and HEIs are also very much dependent on the widening participation resource made available. However, work underway to develop post 16 learning provision across the city aims to address this issue.
- 3.8 It has been possible to retain an element of co-ordination through the voluntary contribution of the post 16 sector. An example of this is the Oxbridge programme, where a local conference attended by over 150 potential Oxbridge applicants was hosted by Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College and a forthcoming visit to Selwyn College in Cambridge will be co-ordinated on behalf of all Leeds sixth forms and colleges by Leeds City College.
- 3.9 Engagement activity between HEIs and schools will depend on a number of factors, including the Access Agreement and the institution's school partnership / liaison strategy. The impact of the access agreement in a number of HEIs has

been to divert funding away from widening participation activity in order to provide bursary support to students once they have started their course. This reduction in budget combined with the loss of external co-ordination of activities and the need for HEIs to target school liaison resources at their priority 'feeder' schools and colleges means that for many there will be significantly less access to HEIs than previously. The Access Agreement arrangements do however provide for a number of widening participation activities with mature students. The Council and a range of partner learning providers continue to work with HEI lifelong learning services to promote learning pathways for adults. They connect HEIs with adults who are engaged in either first rung, informal or accredited learning with a view to exploring progression opportunities. This work specifically targets those mature learners who would not traditionally access higher education, supporting study days, revision courses and a whole range of activities to raise aspiration and increase knowledge of the routes to HEIs

- 3.10 The higher education sector has responded to the need for a strategic sub-regional approach by recently establishing HEART (Higher Education Access: Rewarding Transforming) which will provide a sub-regional subscription model in order to maintain a degree of coordination and collaboration with regard to widening participation and business engagement activities. Six Leeds based providers are included in the partnership: Leeds City College, Leeds College of Art, Leeds College of Building, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds Trinity University College and University of Leeds. The Council have also recently been invited to be represented on the HEART Board.
- 3.11 HEART will have an overview of the Access Agreements and widening participation strategies and a co-ordinating role for a range of activities focused on hard-to-reach groups in target areas. There is an explicit expectation that those institutions with low levels of under-represented learners will invest more in access and widening participation activity than those with high proportions of such learners.
- 3.12 A greater emphasis is now being placed on access and widening participation activity being far more heavily linked to recruitment and marketing. This has therefore resulted in a significant reduction in work with primary schools.
- 3.13 HEIs, schools and colleges working together can contribute to reducing the likelihood that students from widening participation backgrounds will drop out of higher education. Common reasons given for drop out are around managing the transition, a lack of preparation – academically and socially – for higher education, poor course / institution choice and financial pressures. Preparation undertaken during sixth form could minimise this. Ensuring potential students are fully informed about factors influencing drop out will prepare them to better manage these risks. Programmes such as peer mentoring, academic study, and study skills are some of the ways HEIs support young people.

- 3.14 Parents and teachers still top the list of influencers of young people's decision making. At a time when young people and parents see investment in higher education as a financial transaction, it is important that those advising them in schools, colleges and other settings provide clear, factual information, from an earlier age. A common campaign across Leeds and the sub-region would contribute to a clear message that finance need not be a barrier.
- 3.15 Information about graduate destinations and employability will be a key factor in determining a higher education pathway, and course and institution choice. Information about graduate destinations and local labour market information is being produced for young people and parents / carers through the Leeds Pathways information and advice website.
- 3.16 More and more young people are now starting to consider alternative routes to higher education. Over the past year (2010/11) there has been a significant increase (59% compared to 2009/10) in the number of Leeds 16-19 year olds starting an Apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are increasingly being seen as a financially advantageous work-based route that can lead to higher education.
- 3.17 Leeds City Council is working with partners to develop Apprenticeship sector-specific growth strategies to meet the local labour market needs of the city. The number of employers in Leeds offering prestigious and attractive opportunities for learning while earning is growing, some having continuous professional development strategies supporting individuals through to Level 7 & 8.
- 3.18 The increase in Higher Apprenticeships (working towards a Level 4 qualification, Foundation Degree) provides an alternative pathway to higher education combining employment with qualifications. This long term growth strategy is predicted to impact on the number of full time students entering higher education. An example of this would be that Leeds College of Building was awarded the national contract to develop a Level 5 NVQ and Apprenticeships in Sustainable Built Environment and a HND in Construction & the Built Environment, leading to careers in Architectural Technology, Building Services, Construction Management, Civil Engineering and Surveying.
- 3.19 Another changing pattern for higher education study is the increasing role of further education colleges in delivering higher education.
- 3.20 Leeds City College (of which Leeds College of Music is a wholly-owned subsidiary) has confirmed in their strategic plan that they will pursue Higher Education self-awarding powers for foundation degrees and will develop the college as a Higher Education assessment centre. The college (excluding Leeds College of Music) currently have 492 full time and 179 part-time HE students (October 2011). Leeds College of Building have 196 students on HE courses and are planning (through progressions) for their HE provision to grow

by 8% per year over the next three years.

- 3.21 To help ensure that age is not a barrier to participation in learning the government are planning to make loans available to students of both FE and HE level courses. BIS and the Skills Funding Agency will be working with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service to develop a business change support programme for the FE sector, helping colleges and training organisations prepare for the introduction of FE Loans for adults aged 24+ in academic year 2013/14.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 This report has been produced in consultation with staff representatives of Leeds Universities and FE colleges along with colleagues from Environments and Neighbourhoods.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.2.1 An equality impact assessment is not required as this report is for information and not for decision or a policy making document.

### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 4.3.1 This report is relevant to the Children and Young People's Plan and the new Sustainable Economy and Culture Corporate Priority Plan.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 There are no immediate implications. However, it is proposed that proposals around the future commissioning of Information, Advice and Guidance Service relevant to this report will be submitted to Executive Board later in the year.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 There are no immediate implications.

### **4.6 Risk Management**



4.6.1 There are no immediate implications.

## **5 Conclusions**

5.1 It is important not to underestimate the scale of the challenge we face to ensure that all young people see the value of higher education and are in a position to benefit from the opportunities it provides. There are a number of important developments and initiatives underway that will help ensure that all young people and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds receive the support they need to make informed choices around progression to higher education. In addition, whilst we are working to develop and promote alternatives to the traditional route of progression to full time higher education at age 18/19, it will be vital now to monitor the impact of national policy and economic change upon Leeds students with an especial focus upon different groups of students. In this context it will be important to both monitor and evaluate the impact of the proposed local strategies. Finally, by working closely with the universities a deeper understanding of the impact upon students, upon specific institutions and upon specific courses which may long-term have an impact upon the local economy and the community skill base.

## **6 Recommendations**

6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:

- (i) Support an ongoing dialogue between officers and the universities, in particular through further research into the impact upon Leeds' existing students and younger learners (with the potential to enter higher education) and the completion and success rate of those students enrolled on courses.
- (ii) Note the range of developments and initiatives to support progression to higher education already put in place
- (iii) Indicate support for Leeds Education Challenge and the Higher Education Access: Rewarding Transforming (HEART) structures as the most appropriate vehicles to ensure a coordinated approach to support the progression of young people to higher education.
- (iv) Indicate support for considering this issue as part the work around the Child Friendly City priority to: address the barriers that prevent children and young people from engaging in and enjoying learning.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

### 7.1 Access and Widening Participation – Approaches by Leeds Based Institutions

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.