

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

**Report to Executive Board**

**Date: 15 February 2013**

**Subject: Deputation from Leeds Student Unions**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. This report is a response to the Deputation to Council on 14 November 2012 delivered by Anthony Haddley: Union Affairs Officer of Leeds University Students' Union and David Alcorn: President of Leeds Metropolitan University Students' Union.
2. The full deputation is included at appendix 1. It highlights concerns about the overall direction of government policy with regard to higher education, raises a number of specific concerns and also emphasised the contribution students make to the city.
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 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.

**Recommendations**

4. Executive Board is recommended to:
5. Support an ongoing dialogue between officers and universities/colleges, both individually and collectively through the Higher Education Access: Rewarding Transforming (HEART) structures, to monitor and assess the impact of national funding changes and local and regional policies on the economic and social contribution students make to the city.

6. Support the investigation of potential new channels for improving dialogue with HE students and the development of new opportunities for students to engage with schools and local communities through volunteering.
7. Note the range of developments and initiatives already in place to support progression to higher education and the work to develop alternative routes to gain higher level qualifications.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report is a response to the Deputation to Council on 14 November 2012 delivered by Anthony Haddley: Union Affairs Officer of Leeds University Students' Union and David Alcorn: President of Leeds Metropolitan University Students' Union. The full text of the deputation is included in the background papers.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 The deputation to Council expressed concern about the overall direction of government policy with regard to higher education, raises a number of specific concerns and also emphasised the contribution students make to the city. A number of specific areas of concern were detailed including:
- The decline in the number of young people entering higher education
  - Employment opportunities for graduates
  - Housing and transport costs
- 2.2 It should be noted that the Leeds Student's Unions have previously presented deputations to the Council around the changes to the funding of higher education and widening participation in higher education.

## **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 The full scale of the impact of the changes to national funding policy for Higher Education (HE) is complex and the Council is seeking to work with colleges and universities (including staff and student unions) to assess the impact on the city's students, HE institutions and wider impacts on communities especially the city's economy. The Council is proud of its good relationships with the universities and colleges and consider we are supportive and mindful of the large number of students in the city.
- 3.2 The Council value the contribution students make to the city both economically and socially. As such we are also concerned about the declining number of young people entering higher education. We understand that nationally applications to UK universities dropped by 7.6% last year and that interim figures for applications to date this year are down by 6.3%. This is a worrying trend that we would not wish to see continue unchecked. We are particularly concerned about the reported sharp decline in applications from young males and possible impact on applications from under-represented and disadvantaged groups.
- 3.3 The Council 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 the Leeds Education Challenge. The Leeds Education Challenge provides the framework that brings together the council, schools, FE colleges, universities, businesses and other key stakeholders with a contribution to make towards improving learning outcomes for young people in Leeds. We are

also addressing the issue 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.

- 3.4 The increase in tuition fees and associated changes to higher education also 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 and the Education Act 2011 places schools under a new duty to secure independent careers guidance for their pupils.
- 3.5 A new destination measure has been introduced for schools and colleges that shows 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 careers education of their students.
- 3.6 As a Council we see access to high quality impartial careers education and information advice and guidance (CEIAG) on learning and employment opportunities as vital to ensuring that young people not only progress to a positive destination post 16, but also continue to remain engaged in learning beyond the age of 18.
- 3.7 Unlike many councils, Leeds City Council are committed to making a major financial investment to ensure that all young people and particularly the most disadvantaged continue to receive the kind of information, advice and guidance that is vital for them to make properly informed choices. We are continuing to develop Leeds Pathways, our online information and advice service for young people, parents/carers and teachers/professionals and are also investing £2.65m per annum in providing progression services targeted at the most disadvantaged.
- 3.8 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 now available for young people and parents/carers through the Leeds Pathways website.
- 3.9 The Council are aware of the measures that individual universities and FE colleges in Leeds are taking each year in supporting social mobility. Considerable funds are being deployed in this regard and the all the Leeds Institutions offering HE progression are making considerable efforts to mitigate against the loss of Aimhigher and the lifelong learning networks both individually and through their involvement in HEART (Higher Education Access: Rewarding Transforming).
- 3.10 We greatly value the support that thousands of undergraduates provide to our schools, colleges and wider communities each year. We are particularly aware of the contribution they can make 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. 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 valuable ways that undergraduates and HEIs support young people.

- 3.11 The availability of employment opportunities is something that currently faces all within society and not just graduates. The UK like many counties is suffering as a result of the global recession. However, many countries are experiencing the unemployment rates far in excess of those in the UK.
- 3.12 Leeds City Region is not immune to the current economic challenges, however it has a diverse and resilient economy with the largest number of manufacturing workers anywhere in the UK and the largest number of people employed in financial and business services outside the capital. We have one of the largest concentrations of higher education institutions in Europe producing 36,000 undergraduates each year. 36% of combined LCR university research is ranked as world-class and 10% as world-leading in fields such as business & management, medical & healthcare technologies, pharmaceuticals & biotechnology, nano-technology, advanced engineering and textile technology.
- 3.13 Through the City Deal, the Local Enterprise Partnership for Leeds City Region is seeking to deliver activity that will help create more jobs and opportunities for young people and work closely with partners in the public and the private sector to target future investment in skills to key growth sectors.
- 3.14 The City Deal implementation Plan was signed off by Ministers in September 2012 and work has now commenced on delivering programmes in Leeds. The transfer of powers and spending to the Leeds City Region is enabling further investment in skills to contribute to the city's ambition of a NEET free City. We will deliver a wider range of integrated pathways including education, training, volunteering, work experience and apprenticeships, leading to jobs and higher level qualifications to transform the experience of young people entering the labour market, support business growth and create new opportunities for young people.
- 3.15 In addition to proposals around skills and employment the Leeds City Region Deal another key strand aimed at addressing one of the areas raised by the deputation, namely transport. The transport infrastructure for the Leeds City Region has suffered from long-term under-investment and over centralised decision making. The proposals aim to transform the transport system, shrinking journey times, improving journey time reliability and increasing economic productivity. It will deliver cost efficient savings from reformed transport governance and delivery.
- 3.16 Currently students in full-time study (including mature students) and anyone under the age of 22, can buy a weekly or monthly Student Plus MetroCard, which is valid on most bus and train services throughout West Yorkshire. A Student Plus MetroCard currently costs £20.90 per week or £77.40 per month, giving students a monthly saving on the cost of a MetroCard for bus travel and rail zones 1-5.
- 3.17 In relation to the issues raised around housing the Council have a strong record of working in partnership with the landlord groups, universities and Unipol to develop

good quality housing for students with the Leeds Accommodation scheme, supporting Unipol's accreditation work and licensing Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs). In addition we have a good working relationship with the student welfare groups around resolving housing issues and we have a responsive complaint investigation team to respond to property defects.

- 3.18 As a consequence of the reduction in student numbers we are likely to see a reduction in the cost of student accommodation as a result of the basic law of supply and demand. Indeed, many students are already starting to see the benefit of this in terms of a reduction or cessation of payments for the summer break.
- 3.19 More and more young people are now starting to consider alternative routes to higher education. Apprenticeships are increasingly being seen as a financially advantageous work-based route that can lead to higher education. 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.
- 3.20 Another changing pattern for higher education study is the increasing role of further education colleges in delivering higher education. 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 and Leeds College of Building are planning (through progressions) for their HE provision to grow in the coming years. The FE colleges and training providers are looking to provide higher level apprenticeships and Leeds College of Building have already started delivering a Level 5 apprenticeship in the sustainable built environment.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 Consultation is not required as this is a factual report of a deputation with no wider impact. The report has been informed by information received from the university sector and from Environments & Neighbourhoods and City Development directorates of the council.

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

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

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

- 4.3.1 This report is relevant to the Children and Young People's Plan, the new Sustainable Economy and Culture Corporate Priority Plan, The Leeds Growth Strategy and the Leeds City Region Deal.

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

- 4.4.1 There are no immediate implications.

#### **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 vital that the Council monitor the impact of national policy and economic change upon Leeds students particularly in relation to under-represented and disadvantaged groups. In this context it will be important to both monitor and evaluate the impact of the proposed local strategies.
- 5.2 Although it is recognised that students and many others may not necessarily agree with the changes to fees, it is nonetheless the policy of the time and is unlikely to change fundamentally in the near future regardless of the party in power. Therefore, in addition to continuing to promote the benefits to young people of progressing to full-time higher education, we are working to develop and promote alternative routes to gain higher level qualifications through apprenticeships and other part-time study routes.
- 5.3 Finally, we must continue to work closely with our partners in the universities and colleges to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of these changes upon students, upon specific institutions and upon the local economy and skills base.

### **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:
- 6.2 Support an ongoing dialogue between officers and universities/colleges, both individually and collectively through the Higher Education Access: Rewarding Transforming (HEART) structures, to monitor and assess the impact of national funding changes and local and regional policies on the economic and social contribution students make to the city.
- 6.3 Support the investigation of potential new channels for improving dialogue with HE students and the development of new opportunities for students to engage with schools and local communities through volunteering.
- 6.4 Note the range of developments and initiatives already in place to support progression to higher education and the work to develop alternative routes to gain higher level qualifications.

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

7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.