Issue

1. The Council’s approach to resourcing and conducting the first full-scale survey in 2005, and the content of a draft consultation document.

Recommendation

2. The Board is invited to:

   a. Note the contents of the draft consultation document.

   b. Agree the proposed approach to resourcing the 2005 survey.

Timing for decisions

3. An agreement on the proposed approach is needed in order to proceed with the tendering process.

Further Information

4. From Graeme Rosenberg (0117 931 7487)(g.rosenberg@hefce.ac.uk)
Background

5. The Board was last updated on the progress of the survey in September 2003. At that stage we were undertaking the first pilot, and working towards a full-scale survey and publication of results in late 2004. Since then, we agreed with DfES that the first full-scale survey would take place in early 2005 in order to produce results for summer 2005. The reason for this decision was to ensure results – at the point of usage during summer/autumn 2005 – would be up-to-date; and also that conducting the survey during students’ final year of study would help achieve a better response rate (rather than surveying after graduation).

6. Following this decision we commissioned a second, smaller scale, pilot to test the methodology that would be most effective at the anticipated time of year (January to March). Some results of the first pilot have been published and results are now emerging from the second pilot, conducted from January to March 2004.

Discussion

7. We expect the NSS Pilot Steering Group to make its final recommendations during July 2004, on how we should conduct the 2005 survey. Their recommendations will be informed by analysis of the second pilot, and by the results of a consultation with the sector. Results of both of these are due in June.

8. Attached at Annex A is the draft consultation document. The purposes of the document are to inform the sector of emerging proposals, and to seek responses on some issues that will assist the Steering Group in making its recommendations, or to assist the Council in planning the operation.

9. The document sets out proposals on all key aspects of the survey. It has been drafted following consultation with the NSS Pilot Steering Group, but due to timing issues, is currently being considered by the Steering Group for further comment, in parallel to presentation to the Board. Thus some details may change as a result of Steering Group advice, though it is unlikely that any substantial issues would change.

Recommendation: To note the contents of the draft consultation document.

10. In parallel to consulting (during May and June), we need to begin planning and securing resources for the survey. The survey by its nature will involve a range of organisations, and roles need to be clarified and agreed. The proposed approach is as follows:

a. In the first year, HEFCE would have a role in developing systems for processing data, both prior to the survey (i.e. in producing lists of students to be included in the survey, based on HESA data) and after the survey (i.e. in processing the results and preparing it for publication, and providing data back to institutions for their internal use). In future years, once these processes have been developed, these roles could pass to HESA, and we have informally agreed with them that this would be the case. This development work up to summer 2005 will be undertaken the Analytical Services
Group as a continuation of their development of the systems for processing HESA student data for publication on the Teaching Quality Information web-site.

b. We would commission an agency to survey students using the range of methods described in the consultation document. Their role would essentially be to collect and compile the data and pass it to HEFCE for processing. As part of their collection role they would also develop the branding of the survey and produce promotional materials for use locally within HEIs. They would be expected to involve the NUS in this work. They would also need to liaise with individual HEIs throughout the process.

c. HEIs’ roles would be kept to a minimum for a number of reasons: to ensure consistency, ensure the survey is perceived as independent (and that individual responses are not accessible to institutions), improve overall efficiency, and reduce the burden on institutions. HEIs’ input would essentially be to provide contact details (this may involve some burden to generate good quality contact details, which will be essential) and to help with response rates through e-mailings and awareness-raising.

d. NUS would assist with the branding and support local student unions to become involved in local awareness raising activity.

e. HERO would act as publishers of the data, on the TQI site. In advance of publication, HERO would be commissioned to develop and test reporting formats.

f. A researcher would also be commissioned to undertake a national analysis of the data, to provide a ‘health check’ on the survey, suggest future improvements, and explore national trends. This would include identifying whether there are any systematic differences in feedback provided by different ethnic groups, an obligation we have under the Race Relations Amendment Act.

11. Cost estimates for the exercise are beginning to emerge. An initial estimate of costs of procuring the agency is up to £2 million, though will depend on a number of variables which are not yet well known. It could be challenging to secure an agency that meets the full range of requirements, including:

a. The capacity to survey more than 250,000 students in a relatively short period. Telephone surveying in particular is labour intensive.

b. Flexibility. In particular, the required scale of telephoning will not be known with much certainty until well into the process.

c. A range of specialisms (web-design; telephoning; postal surveying). Sub-contracting may required.

d. HEFCW would like to use the same agency, and will thus require duplication in Welsh language for each stage in the process. This is likely to require sub-contracting. All costs associated with Welsh activity will be covered by HEFCW contributions.

e. Initially the contract will be offered only for 1 year, with the possibility but no guarantee of extension (as we do not yet know whether it will be repeated annually or biennially, or whether requirements may change substantially in other ways after 2005).
12. To help in securing an agency which can deliver the requirements we plan to run a two-stage tendering process. In early May we will invite first stage tenders outlining likely requirements in broad terms. We would then short-list tenders that have the appropriate capacity and competences, and invite detailed proposals in the second stage. We would aim to appoint in September 2004, allowing a few months for design work and preparation for the survey.

**Recommendation:** To agree the proposed approach to resourcing the 2005 survey.

**Financial and risk implications**

An initial estimate of the total costs of the proposed approach is as follows:

- Survey agency - £2m
- HERO (to develop formats, conduct user tests and publish results) - £300,000
- Researcher (for the overview analysis) - £100,000
- TOTAL: £2.4m

13. Roughly two thirds of the costs would fall in the financial year 2004-05 and the remainder in 2005-06. A large proportion of the costs could be drawn from the QA programme budget of £5m, and the balance would need to be drawn from the flexibility margin. The QAA contract price will be agreed at the June Board, at which stage the requirements from the flexibility margin will be identified, and the Board will then be asked to agree a transfer of funds from the FM to cover the balance of the NSS costs.

14. There are a number of risks to successful delivery of the survey. A risk register is attached at Annex B.

**Public presentation**

15. A finalised consultation document will be published in May 2004. Various reports on the pilot will also be available on the project web-site run by the Open University. The consultation document is likely to attract press interest. Amongst other things, there could be criticisms of the costs. A press briefing will be prepared to coincide with publication.