



Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

## **Applying Student Number Controls to Alternative Providers with Designated Courses. Response form**

There is no obligation to use this form when responding, but doing so will make your responses easier to analyse. There is no obligation to answer all questions. We look further to receiving your feedback.

The Department may, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, make available, on public request, individual responses.

The closing date for this consultation is **23 January 2013**

Please return completed forms to:

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### Question 1

Name of organisation (or name of person if the response is a personal response and is not submitted on behalf of an organisation)?

What type of organisation is it? (e.g. Alternative Provider, HEI, FEC, Regulatory Body etc.)

This response is on behalf of Moorlands College, a small theological college based in Christchurch, Dorset. Moorlands is an Alternative Provider, offering BA and MA courses. These courses are validated by the University of Gloucestershire through a partnership that has been in place since 1995. The College is registered as a charity (1092000) and a company limited by guarantee (4241702). There are around 230 registered students (190 FTE) of whom approximately 55% receive support from Student Finance. The College is listed in Annex A of the consultation document.

### Question 2

Do you have a preference for Method 1 (control based on eligible students) or Method 2 (control based on students accessing funding)? If so, why is this?

Our main concern is that any method used should leave room for growth. Method 2 is more attractive to us as the data can be collected from SLC systems. As a small college we do not have the resources to readily implement new data system interfaces. A big concern about Method 1 is that any general ratio applied to SLC data and used to estimate overall control numbers might fail to recognise that a high proportion (45%) of our students do not access Student Finance, which would then produce limits for us that were unfairly restrictive. We have concerns about Method 2 as to how we would effectively implement controls: registered students may change their minds about applying for Student Finance, leading to over/under recruitment against controls. It could also leave us in the awkward (and possibly illegal) situation of being able to offer places only to students who are self-funding.

### Question 3

What is your view on submission of data to HESA? Do you think designated courses at alternative providers should participate in the Key Information Set and therefore complete the National Student Survey and Destination of Leavers in Higher Education survey (if student numbers are large enough to permit this)?

Our College already provides basic KIS information through our validating university and this appears on Unistats website. However, our cohort sizes are too small to produce eligible statistical data for NSS. We support and value openness of information but, because of our small size, we have limited administrative resources to collate and submit additional layers of data for HESA or NSS. A subscription to HESA would be yet another cost that has to be spread across a small student number base. The additional effort and costs would be onerous, with little benefit to prospective students or to the College.

### Question 4

Are there any other methods for controlling student numbers on designated courses at alternative providers that you would recommend instead of Method 1 or Method 2?

Student numbers at alternative providers are tiny in comparison to mainstream HEI; the total of 12,000 students who accessed SF support in 11/12 is less than one medium-sized university, and student control numbers for most alternative providers seems like a sledgehammer and nut scenario. We recognise that there are some larger “private universities” for whom controls may be appropriate, but for the smaller colleges, an emphasis on better quality frameworks with tighter designation process tied to financial sustainability and good governance, will be more efficient than control numbers.

### Question 5

Do you agree that there should be an exemption from student number controls for alternative providers with small numbers of students accessing student support? If so, do you have suggestions as to how the Department should define ‘very small’?

Of the 12,000 or so students at alternative providers who accessed SF support in 11/12, half of them are students of only 5 institutions. The remaining 6,000 students are spread across 100 providers. We suggest that student controls be applied when student numbers exceed 1,000, the same level at which university status can be awarded. If this is deemed too high, a lower level of 500 could be used, possibly linked to degree awarding powers. Any alternative provider below the limit would be exempt from student number controls but would of course still be subject to the more subjective criteria of better quality and designation frameworks.

### Question 6

Equality considerations: Do you think that the proposals for applying student number controls will have any equality implications (e.g. positive, negative, or neutral) for people with protected characteristics (as set out in the Equality Act 2010), or people from low income groups?<sup>1</sup> What impacts might there be and do you have any evidence of possible impacts?

From the list of alternative providers in Annex A, a large number are faith-related colleges (Christian, Jewish, Islamic). Unreasonable student number controls could make it much more difficult (through diseconomy of small scale) for students from such niche providers to access student finance. This would run counter to the goal of widening access and promoting equality, especially impacting those with the protected characteristic of religion.

### Question 7

Do you have any other comments on the proposals within this consultation document?

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<sup>1</sup> Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on Ministers to have due regard to three specified equality matters when exercising their functions. These are: a) eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Act; b) advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and c) fostering good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The Equality Duty covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. The duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination also covers marriage and civil partnerships.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to the consultation process, and we support the intention to improve the quality and reputation of alternative providers.

We also welcome the recognition that the treatment of small providers merits a lighter touch. Additional costs, systems and staffing make a huge difference to our narrow cost base, as these can only be spread across our small number of students.

As a charity, our aspirations for growth are driven by public benefit and not by profit, but higher student numbers improve our financial sustainability. We urge that any system of student control numbers allows for reasonable growth (eg 10 to 20% pa). We would also encourage greater recognition of the distinction between profit and not-for-profit providers.

Finally, we note that the unrealistic expectation that controls may be introduced in 13/14. Our courses have already been defined and marketed for 13/14 and the introduction of limits over the coming few months would be unreasonable. Any such limits should be timed for 14/15.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge receipt of individual responses unless you tick the box below:

Please acknowledge this reply

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At BIS we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be okay if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

☒ Yes

☐ No

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