

## **Response from the Royal Society of Chemistry to the HEFCE consultation on withdrawal of funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs) stated**

The RSC is the UK Professional Body for chemical scientists and an international Learned Society for advancing the chemical sciences.

Supported by a network of over 44,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public. In addition to the completed form we would make the following points:

1. The withdrawal of funding for Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQs) initiative is inconsistent with other major HEFCE and Government initiatives e.g The Leitch report and a continuing commitment to lifelong learning. Although it is recognised that HEFCE are trying to put in place measures that may support such initiatives the speed of introduction and the limited timeframe for the targeted funding causes great concern.
2. The RSC welcomes the fact that Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects (SIVs), which includes chemistry, are provided with a targeted allocation in this proposal. However, there is concern that the level of funding is based on past evidence and does not allow for expansion of provision. We strongly urge HEFCE to make SIVs exempt in the same way as Foundation degrees.
3. RSC welcomes the fact that Foundation degrees are exempt.
4. Evidence suggests that most people now will have several different 'careers' during their lifetime, rather than the one or two that people may have previously expected. New technologies and patterns of employment are responsible for this change and suggest that the UK should have a flexible workforce able to meet new demands. It is not only employers who should pay for this. HE needs to be able to contribute too as not everyone who needs retraining is in employment or is in the employment that the UK needs.
5. There is no national database of graduates or other qualifications - how will checking for ELQ status be achieved?  
What happens if students are found to have withheld information?  
Whose responsibility is it to check and how can this be done?
6. The effect on some institutions such as the OU could be immense. The OU's 'share' of the £100M saving is, according to HEFCE, about £30+M. Even at the 'level funding' (at current rates) suggested by HEFCE they stand to lose many millions as there is no inflationary uplift allowed for. The policy is potentially a major threat to OU Chemistry, which is by far the largest provider of part-time chemistry in the UK. Approximately 33% of OU chemistry students fall in the ELQ category and only a very small number (maybe 15% of the total student cohort) are funded even in part by employers. If, over time, OU have to deny access to, or charge prohibitive fees to, ELQ

students OU chemistry student numbers are very likely to fall below a viable number. The OU needs scale to be economic.

7. It should also be noted that students with previous HE experience add something to the educational experience of their fellow students and can bring maturity and a love of learning that can be infectious.