

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Widening access: conference outcomes, consultation and information request on partnerships with schools and colleges

Date: 18 March 2015
Reference: W15/04HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales; Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales; Widening Access Heads; fee plan contacts; UHOVI Directors; Reaching Wider Managers and interested parties.
Response by: **Monday 20 April 2015**
Contact: Name: Jane Johns
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This circular provides the outcomes of the HEFCW national widening access conference 2014. It invites consultation responses on a draft widening access programme of action and it requests information on universities' partnership working with schools and colleges in Wales.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please telephone us on (029) 2068 2225 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular provides the outcomes of the HEFCW national widening access conference 2014. It invites consultation responses on a draft widening access programme of action and it requests information on universities' partnership working with schools and colleges in Wales.

Background

HEFCW Widening Access conference

2. The HEFCW national Widening Access Conference (December 2014) provided an opportunity for cross-sectoral, multi-agency discussions on widening access policy and practice. The conference provided a forum for the Minister for Education and Skills to set out his ambitions for, and challenge the sector to do more to, widen access to higher education.

Widening Access programme of action

3. Following the Widening Access conference the Welsh Government has asked us to prepare and submit a Widening Access Programme of Action. The Programme of Action includes an audit of universities' relationships with schools and colleges, as requested.

Universities schools/college partnerships

4. At the Widening Access conference the Minister for Education and Skills emphasised the importance he placed on university/school partnerships. Following the conference we have agreed to undertake an audit of university/schools partnerships in Wales and to include partnership working with Welsh Colleges.

Widening Access (WA) conference and outcomes

5. A summary of the Minister for Education and Skills' presentation is provided at **Annex A**. The Minister recognised the positive progress made in widening access to higher education and received a copy of *Widening Access: Delivering for Wales* which illustrates the breadth of widening access provision in Wales¹.
6. A cross-sector conference panel welcomed the Minister's commitment to raising ambitions for learners of all ages and reflected on the challenges in widening access to higher education. The panel's responses took account of presentations by the HEFCW Chief Executive, David Blaney; the Co-Director of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and

¹ *Widening Access: Delivering for Wales*, [Welsh](#) and [English](#) version available.

Methods (WISERD²) Professor Chris Taylor; and a Head Teacher seconded to the Welsh Government, Geraint Rees.

7. A list of panel members and a summary of their views on widening access policy and implementation is attached as **Annex B**.
8. Round table consultation sessions with conference delegates considered a number of questions to inform widening access development. The consultation questions and a summary of responses are attached as **Annex C**. The sessions raised issues including: the importance of all-age approaches; diverse delivery modes; WA priority groups; effective collaborative frameworks; the promotion of higher education; lifelong learning and higher-level skills; evaluation and measures; and funding.

Widening Access programme of action consultation

9. In the light of the WA conference, we have drafted a programme of action which takes account of our current funding constraints. The programme is intended to be high-level and to respond to Welsh Government expectations, including as set out at the conference.
10. The widening access programme of action will underpin HEFCW's *Widening Access Strategic Approach* and articulate national, regional and local actions to widening access³.
11. To inform the development and implementation of the programme we will:
 - i. take into account the outcomes of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) grant-funded work on widening access impacts when they are published;
 - ii. publish an evaluation of Reaching Wider Strategies;
 - iii. gather evidence on the proportion of "student fee" funds devoted to widening access and participation activity from scholarships and bursaries to school partnership and engagement activity, as well as student placement and employment preparation⁴; and
 - iv. audit sector-wide partnerships between universities, schools and colleges, as set out below.
12. The draft programme of action is attached as **Annex D**.
13. In responding to this consultation, we would welcome advice on developing the programme generally, including in relation to equality issues.
14. Specifically, but not exclusively, it would be helpful to receive advice on:

² [WISERD](#)

³ HEFCW's [Strategic Approach to Widening Access 2013/14 to 2015/16](#)

⁴ See circular [W15/03HE](#)

- The extent to which the programme of action will contribute to Welsh Government widening access-related expectations. If more could be done, please advise us.
- The extent to which the identified actions will support the sector to improve widening access to higher education opportunities and our priorities, as set out in our Corporate Strategy widening access theme⁵ and WA Strategic Approach. If there are gaps in the programme, please advise us.
- Specifically in relation to universities' partnerships with schools and colleges, are there innovative, low-cost/no cost developments we should consider to improve progression to, through and beyond higher education?
- Whether there are additional innovative approaches we should consider, taking account of resource constraints, and, if so, how might we implement and monitor them?
- Whether there are any aspects of the programme, or its implementation, that might impact negatively, or have unintended consequences for, individuals with protected characteristics or individuals under-represented in higher education⁶?
- Are there any equality and diversity, sustainability, or Welsh medium issues that should be considered further in developing the draft programme of action?

Consultation responses

15. Consultation responses should be sent to Rachel O'Gorman rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk by **Monday 20 April 2015**, using the template attached as **Annex E**.
16. We will submit the revised programme of action to the Welsh Government by 1 June 2015, as requested.

Universities' partnerships with schools and colleges

17. The audit of universities' partnership relations with schools and colleges will demonstrate the extent of the sector's regional widening access work with schools and colleges in Wales, including work through the Reaching Wider Partnerships and UHOVI.

⁵ HEFCW [Corporate Strategy widening access theme](#), p. 11

⁶ Protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

18. The audit focuses on long-term, widening access relationships rather than 'one-off' interventions such as marketing or admissions mailings or recruitment activity. The audit should reflect significant, ongoing engagements with schools and colleges through activities, for people of all ages, such as mentoring, or taster short courses.
19. One audit response should be submitted to us for each university. In addition, we expect that Reaching Wider Partnerships and UHOVI will want to respond using programme-specific templates as they receive separate funding.
20. Through the audit we aim to demonstrate the extent to which universities are engaging with Welsh Government priorities such as: Schools Challenge Cymru Schools⁷, schools and colleges with high numbers of Communities First pupils/in Communities First areas and/or in Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) areas or high numbers of WIMD learners⁸. Please include reference to these priorities in the response template.
21. A template is provided at **Annex F**. Please submit the completed template by **20 April 2015** to **Rachel O'Gorman** in Word format, or with an accompanying Word version.

Timetable

22. A timetable is as follows:

Action	Submission
Consultation responses on the WA programme of action submitted to HEFCW	20 April 2015
HEFCW to finalise the programme of action and submit it to Welsh Government	1 June 2015
Responses to the universities/schools/colleges audit submitted to HEFCW	20 April 2015
HEFCW to submit the audit report to Welsh Government	1 June 2015

Equality and diversity implications

23. We will be carrying out an equality impact assessment to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We will also consider the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales. Contact rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about EIAs.

⁷ Schools Challenge Cymru [Pathways to Success Schools](#)

⁸ Universities, Partnerships etc will know the schools/colleges with higher than the regional average numbers of Communities First, WIMD, learners. We realise that the percentage might differ from region to region.

24. A similar responsibility rests on higher education institution partners to assess the impact of your proposals to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.

Further information / responses to

25. For further information contact Rachel O'Gorman (tel 029 2068 2227; email rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk). Please submit the template/s to Rachel by **20 April 2015**.