

Tŷ Afon, Ffordd Bedwas
Bedwas, Caerffili,
CF83 8WT

029 2085 9696

Tŷ Afon, Bedwas Road
Bedwas, Caerphilly
CF83 8WT

www.hefcw.ac.uk

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
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Cylchlythyr | Circular

Consultation: Reaching Wider Programme 2022/23 to 2024/25

Date: 05 August 2021
Reference: W21/27HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of further education colleges in Wales
Reaching Wider Partnership Chairs
Response by: 01 October 2021
Contact: Name: Savanna Jones
Email: savanna.jones@hefcw.ac.uk

This is a consultation on the Reaching Wider Programme from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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Introduction

1. This consultation invites views on the Reaching Wider (RW) Programme from 2022/23 to 2024/25.
2. We are consulting to improve the contribution of the RW Programme to widening access to higher education and meeting Welsh Government and HEFCW priorities.
3. This technical consultation will be of interest to RW Partnerships and their members, regulated institutions, planners and those responsible for widening access and fee and access plans.
4. We have undertaken some initial discussions to inform this circular. We will continue to do this to enable us to consider a wide range of views about the RW Programme, including from other interested parties.
5. [Circular W18/14HE](#) provides information on the RW Programme and its operation including:
 - background and purpose;
 - alignment with Welsh Government and HEFCW policies and priorities;
 - structures and funding; and
 - evaluations.
6. If further information about the RW Programme would be helpful to inform a response to this consultation, please contact Savanna Jones at the address provided on the cover of this consultation.

Why are we consulting now?

7. We will invite new RW Partnership strategies for the period 2022/23 to 2024/25. The new strategy period provides the opportunity to take stock of the RW Programme. Consultation responses will help us improve the RW Programme and inform our guidance to Partnerships and institutions.
8. RW has a long history of widening access to higher education and supporting equality of educational opportunity. We are consulting during a prolonged period of disrupted education for learners of all ages. We will take account of the evidence of long-term inequality in educational opportunities and the impacts of the pandemic on people under-represented in higher education as we develop the RW Programme.
9. Our remit letter from Welsh Government includes an expectation that higher education supports schools and schools' curriculum development (see [remit letter](#) paragraphs 32 to 36). The RW Programme contributes to this.

What do we want to achieve?

10. We fund the RW Programme as it contributes to:
 - improving the well-being of future generations, particularly those from RW priority groups that are under-represented in higher education;
 - improving equality of opportunity for RW priority groups of all-ages to achieve their full academic potential and succeed in higher level learning;
 - improving equity in entry and success rates in higher education between RW priority groups of all ages and their peers; and
 - securing Wales-wide, regional collaboration between higher education institutions, further education colleges, schools and other partners.

11. HEFCW's [national measures](#) assist us in monitoring higher education performance. The widening access national measure relates to the number and proportion of all Welsh domiciled students of all ages studying higher education courses at higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales who live in the bottom two quintiles of Lower Super Output Areas in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). Between 2016/17 and 2019/20 the number and proportion of undergraduate Welsh domiciled students of all ages within this measure have increased from 21,620 to 23,475 students and from 37.6% to 40.0%. The RW Programme is one mechanism higher education institutions employ to widen access and inclusion as captured by this measure.

How we have developed the consultation proposals?

12. This consultation has been developed taking account of:
 - the Equality and Human Rights [Is Wales Fairer?](#) (2018) report;
 - HEFCW's duties under the [Equality Act 2010](#) and its commitment to 'act in the spirit of' the [Socio-economic duty](#);
 - the [Well-being and Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#);
 - the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill](#) developments;
 - the Welsh Government's [Programme of Government](#) commitments;
 - the Welsh Government's [Renew and reform: supporting learners' well-being and progression](#) guidance;
 - [HEFCW's remit letter 2021-22](#);
 - HEFCW's Corporate Strategy¹;
 - HEFCW's commitment to [civic mission](#);
 - the implementation of the new [Curriculum for Wales](#).

13. This consultation has been informed by advice from:
 - RW Partnerships, including Partnership Chairs;

¹ HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2020-24 has been approved by Welsh Government and will be available on our website.

- HEFCW committees, including the [Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee](#);
- a review of regulated institutions' [fee and access plan](#) contributions to the RW Programme;
- a review of HEFCW-commissioned RW evaluation findings²
- an impact assessment taking account of protected characteristics, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act goals and ways of working, and our Welsh language duties.

Consultation Proposals

14. The consultation proposals are included at the end of each section and in the consultation response template in **Annex A**.

Section One

What should we build on?

15. HEFCW has invested in the RW Programme since 2002/03, recognising that widening access to and through higher education is a long-term agenda. We want to continue to make progress in widening access and inclusion. We consider some stability for the RW Programme is important, including because of the pandemic's ongoing impact on new and different ways of learning and on learners' well-being. While there are challenges to resetting an existing programme, there are benefits to doing so, including retaining expertise and established, collaborative arrangements. Therefore, we are seeking views on what should be retained and what should be improved.

The two pillar structure of the Reaching Wider Programme

16. The two pillar structure of the RW Programme with contributions from RW Partnerships and higher education institutions was established in 2018/19. The structure supports collaboration between higher education institutions

² [Evaluation of the widening access activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative in Welsh Higher Education Institutions](#) by Arad Consulting Ltd (2007);
[A review of Welsh institutional widening access strategies 2006/07 to 2008/09 and the Reaching Wider funded proposals 2008/10](#) by the Higher Education Academy (led by HEA core staff) (2009);
[Review of widening access and Reaching Wider strategies in Wales](#) by the Higher Education Academy (led by HEA consultants Michael Hill and Sue Hatt) (2012);
[Access to Higher Education in Wales: A Report to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales](#) by WISERD (Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods) (2015).

and RW Partnerships and increases the resources of the RW Programme. We propose retaining the two pillar structure.

The Reaching Wider Programme priority groups

17. [The Equality and Human Rights Commission's](#) report [Is Wales Fairer? 2018](#) (p23) confirms that: 'There is a clear association between socio-economic status and educational attainment across the UK. Even high-attaining children from disadvantaged family backgrounds are less successful later in life than those from better-off families'.
18. The HEFCW widening access National Measure provides a proxy measure for socio-economic disadvantage and contributes to HEFCW's commitment to 'act in the spirit of the Equality Act's socio-economic duty'³. The measure includes all ages studying higher education courses (see paragraph 11).
19. [Care experienced](#) young people of all ages are under-represented in higher education. Best estimates indicate that only 12% of those who leave care enrol in higher education by the age of 23, compared to 40% of non-care leavers. Care experienced young people are a third more likely to withdraw from their studies.
20. Care experienced people face significant challenges when accessing and succeeding in higher education. Wales has an average [37 percentage point gap in attainment](#)⁴ at level 2 between [looked-after children](#) and their peers.
21. Carers can become overwhelmed by the needs of people they are looking after, which can impact on the ability to engage in learning and create challenges during transition periods. [The Carers Trust](#) notes that there are no national data on the number of carers in higher education as not all carers disclose caring responsibilities and their carer status can change. Young adult carers are often a hidden population and so can be harder to reach and encourage into higher education. They also may feel less able to access higher education due to their caring responsibilities at home and may require more support when they do engage.
22. We propose to continue to consider learners from areas of socio-economic disadvantage, care experienced young people, and carers as priority groups for the RW Programme.

Supporting and promoting the Welsh language

23. The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's (the Coleg) strategic plan 2020/21 to 2024/25 [Setting the Pathways of Success](#) sets out its vision that 'Welsh should be a part of the pattern of lifelong learning for the people of Wales'.

³ HEFCW widening access national measure: The number and proportion of all Welsh domiciled students of all ages studying higher education courses at HE institutions and FE institutions in Wales who are domiciled in a) the bottom two quintiles b) the bottom quintile of Lower Super Output Areas in the WIMD 2014.

⁴ [Welsh Government data on care experienced children's qualifications](#).

The vision and priorities commit to ‘collaborate proactively with partners’ (priority 4) in order to contribute to the Welsh Government’s strategy [Cymraeg 2050](#): A million Welsh speakers.

24. HEFCW’s national measure for Welsh medium study shows that the number of students studying 5 or more credits in higher and further education has decreased from 5,575 to 4,965 between 2016/17 and 2019/20. The Welsh Government’s guidance *Renew and reform supporting learners’ well-being and progression* (page 5) indicates that there will have been ‘specific challenges for Welsh immersion learners in English speaking households’ as a result of disrupted learning.
25. We propose to maintain a focus on supporting and promoting the Welsh language within the RW Programme.

The Reaching Wider Partnerships’ national offer framework and high-level description of interventions

26. The RW Partnerships have delivered activities against a ‘national offer’ framework since 2014/15. The framework, set out in **Annex B**, comprises key interventions identified as good practice in widening access to higher education.
27. The national offer is described at a high level to enable RW Partnerships to deliver relevant activities that meet regional needs. In developing the 2017/18 RW Programme guidance, we responded to steers and revised the RW national offer of targeted provision to recognise specifically the benefits of mentoring and information, advice and guidance.
28. We propose to retain the national offer framework.

Question 1a: Do you agree that we should retain and build on some of the structures and priorities of the Reaching Wider Programme, particularly:

- i. the two pillar structure of the Reaching Wider Programme;***
- ii. the Reaching Wider Programme priority groups;***
- iii. supporting and promoting the Welsh language; and***
- iv. the Reaching Wider Partnerships’ national offer framework and high-level description of interventions?***

Question 1b: If not, please tell us why and explain briefly how the structures and priorities should change?

Section Two

Maximising the contribution of the Reaching Wider Programme to widening access to higher level learning

29. This section invites views on how we should improve the RW Programme to increase its contribution to widening access and inclusion in higher-level learning.

Structures and priority groups

30. Changes to the RW Programme from 2017/18 resulted in the RW Partnerships focusing on engaging with young people up to the age of 16 years with higher education institutions prioritising young people aged 16 years plus. Both Partnerships and institutions continue to prioritise adults without level four qualifications and people with care experience and carers. There may have been unintended consequences of this change:
- the Partnerships' regional, collaborative approach across all school years provided a single point of contact for impartial, targeted RW activity. This approach avoids nugatory competition and reduces the burden on schools and partners;
 - ensuring successful learner progression from RW Partnership activities institutions to RW institutional activities may be more challenging and has not been clearly evidenced through Partnership nor institutions' monitoring and reporting to us; and
 - some further education colleges may have found it more difficult to contribute effectively to supporting learners aged 16 plus through the RW Programme.
31. We propose that RW Partnerships should extend their activities to cover all young people in RW priority areas who have not achieved a level 4 qualification.

Refocusing the contribution that higher education institutions make to the Reaching Wider Programme

32. The expertise and collaboration of higher education institutions, as RW partners and as they fund equality of opportunity through fee and access plan commitments, is fundamental to the RW Programme. If Partnerships extend their activities, as proposed in the section 'structures and priority groups' above, this would enable higher education institutions to refocus fee and access RW-related resources on supporting their RW Partnership's management and governance, delivering complimentary institution-specific activities and on improving the retention and success of RW priority groups.

Further supporting equality of opportunity

33. HEFCW and higher education institutions have a general duty under the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(Wales\)](#) to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. The RW Programme is a mechanism to support learners of all ages with protected characteristics in RW geographic areas to achieve their educational potential and succeed in higher-level learning.
34. We propose that the RW Partnerships increase their focus on supporting people with protected characteristics who live in RW priority areas.

Raising the profile of the RW Programme

35. To improve coherence between Partnerships and across Wales and to improve understanding of how RW supports its partners and learners we propose to re-affirm the RW Partnerships' national offer framework and strengthen the RW brand. Strengthening the national offer and brand should not be at the expense of losing existing brand awareness. We are inviting evidence that substantially changing the national offer and brand will improve the promotion of Reaching Wider.

Question 2a: Are there benefits or potential unintended consequences to the Reaching Wider Partnerships prioritising all Reaching Wider priority age groups within its region up to level 4 learning?

Question 2b: Are there benefits or potential unintended consequences of institutions refocusing their Reaching Wider fee and access plan contribution?

Question 3: What other ways might Reaching Wider structures and priorities be enhanced and what is the evidence for this?

Measuring performance

36. We have undertaken national evaluations of widening access and the RW Programme as a cost effective means of understanding progress and how to improve performance. We monitor a range of UK, Wales and institution-specific widening access-related quantitative data and qualitative evidence, including Partnerships' engagement and performance.
37. To underpin HEFCW's new Corporate Strategy⁵, HEFCW will be developing widening access indicators and measures of success.

Question 4: How should we measure the performance of the Reaching Wider Programme, including the contributions from the

⁵ HEFCW's new Corporate Strategy from 2021/22 has been approved by Welsh Government and will be published shortly.

Partnerships and higher education institutions, to widening access to higher education from RW priority groups?

Funding the RW Programme

38. We fund the RW Partnerships because regional, collaborative working is expensive and requires long-term investment that benefits all higher education institutions in Wales and supports learners wherever they choose to study.
39. From 2022/23 the total RW Programme investment will be £3.7m annually. The allocation will comprise of £2m a year investment from us to support RW Partnership strategies. Higher education institutions fund their contribution to the RW Programme through fee and access plan investment of £1.7m annually.
40. Given the funding parameters and Wales-wide remit, this consultation seeks views on how RW funding should be used to increase widening access to higher education for under-represented groups in higher education.

Question 5: How might Reaching Wider funding be used more effectively to widen access to higher education collaboratively, regionally and Wales-wide?

Additional information

Question 6: Do you have any further feedback that could not easily be included in the questions above?

Impact assessments

41. We will continue to impact assess the implementation of the RW guidance and funding for the next strategy period to ensure we achieve our objectives. To inform impact assessment, in relation to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, equality and diversity and the Welsh language, we are inviting through this circular, responses to the following questions:

Question 7: Do the proposals have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the [Well-being of Future Generation \(Wales\) Act's](#) sustainable development principle, seven wellbeing goals, and five ways of working?

Question 8: What positive or adverse effects will the proposals have on:

- i. opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?; and***
- ii. treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?***

Question 9: Could the proposals be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects, on:

- i. opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?; and***
- ii. treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?***

42. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.

Responding to the consultation

43. Please ensure your responses are set out against the questions posed throughout the consultation and collated at Annex A.
44. Please respond to this consultation electronically. Responses should be emailed to Sheridan Nott (sheridan.nott@hefcw.ac.uk). The consultation closes on **1 October 2021**. We are unable to accept responses after this time.

Further information

45. For further information, contact Savanna Jones (email savanna.jones@hefcw.ac.uk).

HEFCW Reaching Wider Programme Consultation response form

Organisation:	
Contact:	
Contact email address:	

Question 1a: Do you agree that we should retain and build on some of the structures and priorities of the Reaching Wider Programme, particularly:

- i. the two pillar structure of the Reaching Wider Programme;
- ii. the Reaching Wider Programme priority groups;
- iii. supporting and promoting the Welsh language; and
- iv. the Reaching Wider Partnerships' national offer framework and high-level description of interventions?

Question 1b: If not, please tell us why and explain briefly how the structures and priorities should change?

Question 2a: Are there benefits or potential unintended consequences to the Reaching Wider Partnerships prioritising all Reaching Wider priority groups within its region up to level 4 learning?

Question 2b: Are there benefits or potential unintended consequences of institutions refocusing their Reaching Wider fee and access plan contribution?

Question 3: What other ways might Reaching Wider structures and priorities be enhanced and what is the evidence for this?

Question 4: How should we measure the performance of the Reaching Wider Programme, including the contributions from the Partnerships and higher education institutions, to widening access to higher education?

Question 5: How might Reaching Wider funding be used more effectively to widening access to higher education collaboratively, regionally and Wales-wide?

Question 6: Do you have any further feedback that could not be easily included in the questions above?

Question 7: Do the proposals have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the [Well-being of Future Generation \(Wales\) Act's](#) sustainable development principle, seven wellbeing goals, and five ways of working?

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Reaching Wider Partnerships' National Offer Framework

The RW 'national offer' framework describes at a high level our expectations of activities and services to be provided in the following areas:

- educational attainment-raising activities;
- mentoring to provide academic, social and emotional support to prepare for level 4 higher education; and
- increasing awareness of level 4 subjects, modes of study, locations and financial support available, including through information, advice and guidance.

The national offer of activities includes a range of delivery modes, including outreach, on campus and in Welsh and/or English as appropriate.