

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This paper invites the Council to consider a draft Communications Policy and Strategy.

BACKGROUND

- 2 In 2001, an 'interim' Communications Strategy was developed by ELWa's Participation and Communications Directorate on behalf of HEFCW, which set out proposals for 12 months' worth of activities. The principles of the strategy were accepted by the Council, although, at the time, members:

- agreed that HEFCW should not be promoted for its own sake, and that HEFCW's public relations responsibility was to help establish – in the minds of people in Wales, the UK and internationally – the value and standing of Welsh HE institutions. Any promotion of HEFCW should arise only as a means to this end; and
- suggested the work of the Council would best be promoted in an indirect way through the role it plays in:
 - promoting the idea of higher education;
 - promoting and celebrating the success of higher education institutions in Wales; and
 - raising the aspirations of people in Wales towards participation in HE.

Council acknowledged, however, that in order to achieve these things it may sometimes be expedient for HEFCW to draw attention to its own work and achievements.

- 3 The interim ELWa strategy was taken no further. Nevertheless, in the past few years HEFCW has sought to develop its communications activities in various ways, including:
 - commissioning consultants to research and prepare a detailed set of branding and image guidelines, to inform HEFCW publications and the new website;
 - the development of a new, standalone, HEFCW website (drawing on the aforementioned branding guidelines);
 - the development of a more sophisticated and direct media monitoring system for Council members, using newsfeeds;
 - the development of a statement on HEFCW culture, values and behaviours, which include distinct references to communications;
 - increasing the use of electronic communications (for example, the relaunch of the HEFCW newsletter and distributing circulars electronically);
 - forging stronger links with the media, including the negotiation to provide monthly articles in the Western Mail;
 - the establishment of Management Board meetings every three weeks which plan and review media and publicity issues at each meeting (including press releases and the message calendar, and more general HE issues that may be of interest to the media); and
 - the establishment of a dedicated Communications Manager post.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNICATIONS POLICY AND STRATEGY

- 4 It is now felt to be expedient to develop a Communications Policy and Strategy to provide a strategic framework for these activities and as an impetus for continuous development. It is particularly timely that we do so given that the Welsh Assembly Government has, in this year's Remit Letter, indicated that it is keen to "build on progress made in developing a more coherent and strategic approach to communications across all of the sectors" for which we have responsibility¹.
- 5 This draft Communications Policy and Strategy has been informed by a number of communications policies or strategies, including those by the Scottish Funding Council, HEFCE, HEW, UWIC and the Arts Council of Wales, and has been scrutinised by Management Board.

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF A COMMUNICATIONS POLICY AND STRATEGY

- 6 It is hoped that the development and promulgation of a Communications Policy and Strategy for HEFCW will:
 - explain HEFCW's approach to effective communications activities;
 - outline the roles and responsibilities of staff in managing communications;
 - help well-informed staff deliver messages about HEFCW effectively and strategically;
 - set out the parameters to take forward a range of communications activities; and
 - give us an effective framework within which to deliver with consistency our corporate and operational aims, showing HEFCW as accessible, accountable and responsive.

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

- 7 A draft Communications Policy is attached at **Annex A**. It is structured as follows:
 - **About HEFCW**
 - **Policy Statement** Our approach to communications in HEFCW and what the Policy sets out to do.
 - **Policy Aims**
 - **Policy Objectives** A list of specific policy objectives for a Communications Policy for HEFCW, and how the Policy will help us achieve these goals. The actions in the separate **Strategy** have been mapped to the policy objectives.
 - **Target audiences** Identifies our internal and external audiences and helps us to think about what types of relationships we have with them.
 - **Communicating our key messages** Examples of how we might communicate our messages to our audiences.
 - **Roles and responsibilities** This notes the general role of all staff and the more specific roles of the Communications Manager, Heads of Team and Council members.
 - **Media relations/activities** This provides a statement on how we deal with media enquiries. The Strategy notes that more detailed media handling procedures will be developed.
 - **Monitoring and evaluation** Suggestions for how to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our communications activities.
 - **Annex – other related policies and a fuller list of partners** This refers to other useful documents which will help us fulfil these policy objectives, including a statement about expected standards of service and our Accessible Information Policy. Procedures for dealing with these will be available separately.

The Council is invited to consider and agree the draft Communications Policy.

¹ "Effective communications are equally important in the higher education sector. I would like the Council to work with my officials to take stock of how the Council's work in this area can complement activity at Assembly Government level. It would be sensible for such an exercise to be conducted during the first quarter of 2007-08 so that it can inform our collective work through the remainder of the year."

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- 8 A draft Communications Strategy is attached at **Annex B**. This helps 'bring to life' the aims and objectives of the Communications Policy by identifying a number of new and ongoing actions in line with the Policy objectives. The Strategy may be changed further in light of steers from Council today, and following more extensive consultation with staff.

The Council is invited to consider and agree the draft Communications Strategy as a means of taking forward the objectives in the Communications Policy.

NEXT STEPS

- 9 Over the coming weeks, officers will:
- Finalise the Communications Policy and Strategy, in light of steers from Council;
 - As part of the above, finalise various complementary policy documents such as the Style Guide, Accessible Information Policy and Consultation Policy;
 - Disseminate the Policy and Strategy to all staff; and
 - Take forward the first actions in the Strategy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10 There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations in the paper. Most actions in the Communications Strategy already have budgets dedicated to them or can be achieved through electronic communications, which presents a monetary, energy and paper saving. The Communications Policy and Strategy does have a bearing on the work of all staff in HEFCW, who will need to take account of its implications, as required, and, in particular, drive the work of the Communications Manager.

PUBLICITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11 The Policy and Strategy will inform how we deal with all our communications and media activities and should help us better plan and 'focus' in this area. This should see us sharpen our media activity (as appropriate), responsiveness and the clarity of our messages in partnership with bodies such as WAG and HEW. The Policy will be published on our website.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- 12 The main risk of **not** having an effective Communications Policy and Strategy is a lack of a strategy framework to inform an efficient and continuously improving set of standards for communications in HEFCW. An ad-hoc approach to communications would be less likely to promote good practice. For example, not having a Communications Policy could:
- reduce the likelihood of our corporate messages being clear and consistent;
 - weaken our professional profile with our audiences, including HEIs and the media;
 - leave a gap in our processes for evaluating and improving our own performance in this area;
 - lead us to missing opportunities to promote HE in Wales and not plan as effectively; and
 - adversely affect our ability to provide accessible information using appropriate language and media.
- 13 Once the Communications Policy and Strategy have been finalised, they will need to be implemented. The residual risk of staff not being made aware of them will need to be alleviated by the Communications Manager taking a lead in ensuring that guidance notes and associated procedures are drafted and that the Policy and Strategy are embedded and monitored.

DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 14 The Communications Policy pledges that HEFCW will provide information that is recognisable, consistent and suitably accessible, using appropriate language and media. The Policy refers to a separate Accessible Information Policy, to be developed by the Disability and Diversity Co-ordinator and the Communications Manager, which will set out our standards for providing information in a range of formats. The Communications Policy will also be informed by our Welsh Language Scheme, our Style Guide (in development) and our Equality and Diversity Policy, all of which discuss accessibility to information in the context of equality and diversity.
- 15 The Policy has been assessed for its impact on equality matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16 The Council is invited to:
- i. The Council is invited to consider and agree the draft Communications Policy.*
 - ii. The Council is invited to consider and agree the draft Communications Strategy as a means of taking forward the objectives in the Communications Policy.*

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