

Meeting	Agenda Item	Reference No
26/01/07	16	HEFCW/07/10

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This paper reports on the progress, outcomes and expenditure of the four Reaching Wider Partnerships, and on coordination by the Reaching Wider National Coordinator, during the period April 2005 to December 2006. It also reports on progress with the Reaching Wider (RW) All-Wales Activities funding and notes general progress with the RW initiative.

BACKGROUND

2. The Reaching Wider (RW) initiative was established under the Welsh Assembly Government's ten year strategy for higher education, *Reaching Higher* (March 2002). HEFCW received proposals from four Partnerships (North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South West Wales, South East Wales) which were initially funded for one year from April 2003. Council approved second year funding in March 2004, third year funding in September 2004 and fourth and fifth year funding in March 2006. Partnerships are, therefore, currently funded until August 2008.
3. Additional 'All Wales Activities' pilot projects were funded, with Council's agreement (December 2005), from the Reaching Wider budget. Two regional pilot projects were funded (total £58k) with a third proposal to be funded subject to a satisfactory revised proposal (£27,500). In March 2006 Council agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to approve All-Wales Activity funding, up to a maximum of £200k, for the extension of agreed RW All-Wales Activities in 2006/08.
4. In March 2006 Council ratified an additional allocation of £750k, from the Reaching Wider budget, to HEIs to: encourage more effective alignment between institutional widening access provision and the Reaching Wider Initiative; improve sector performance against the widening access Reaching Wider targets; develop work arising from HEFCW's race equality impact assessments and to respond to remit letter (2006-07) guidance to develop HEIs' work with people with a care background. Institutional allocations would be made, subject to the submission of satisfactory articulation strategies demonstrating alignment between HEIs' widening access activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative. Generic feedback on the articulation strategies is available from officers on request.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Year Three Key Outcomes

5. Activities in this reporting period build on core activities in years one and two as indicated in **Annex A** of this report. Significant outcomes during year two included:
 - The launch of the bilingual peer-mentoring project by the North Wales Partnership at the Urdd Eisteddfod.
 - The North Wales Partnership developed bridging modules to raise the skills and confidence of hearing-impaired students to facilitate their progression from level 3 Communication Support Worker Skills to level 4 Interpreter Training for hearing and deaf learners.
 - The accreditation of undergraduate mentoring modules by the South East Wales Partnership (First Campus) to enable undergraduate mentoring skills to be formally recognised. The move to HEI-funded mentoring modules has resulted in the financial sustainability of mentoring provision.

- The West and Mid Wales Partnership continued to attract external funding from Scottish Power and Europe.
 - HEIs within the South East Wales Partnership gained a second Assembly contract to deliver 14-19 Learning Pathways Learning Coach training thus raising the profile of the Partnership.
 - The South West Wales Partnership has developed work with the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Centre's Welsh medium Teaching Fellow to assist with Welsh medium activities.
 - The South East Wales Partnership delivered a two-day Welsh medium literature event for more than 1,000 pupils.
 - All four Partnerships independently commissioned external evaluations and have provided evidence of responding positively to their evaluation's findings. These evaluations have fed into the national evaluation of widening access funded activities and Reaching Wider. (The national evaluation is a separate agenda item at this Council meeting.)
 - All Partnerships submitted revised critical audits reviewing widening access gaps in, and unnecessary duplication of, provision in their Partnership area.
- 6 All Partnerships both exceeded some and fell short of other specific targets, which might be expected as Partnerships continued to develop new collaborative working relations with schools, communities and other stakeholders to deliver innovative activity. We have advised all Partnerships to review their target setting to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging and enable effective progress to be made towards the Reaching Higher widening access targets.
- 7 HEFCW officers continue to have concerns about the ability of the West and Mid Wales Partnership to effectively contribute to RW targets when working exclusively within its region, given the population distribution within its catchment area. Furthermore, Trinity College's request to transfer to the South West Wales Partnership in year four, in effect restructuring the regional Partnership framework, has created some tensions for the two Partnerships. Council's recommendation (March 2006) that the two Partnerships consider forming a single, merged Partnership structure was not well-received and two separate, revised funding proposals 2006/07 were finally submitted in December 2006. Officers await the outcome of the consultation on the national evaluation findings which may offer advice on the most effective way to deliver Reaching Wider activities across the south, west and mid Wales regions.
- 8 Key development activities undertaken by the Reaching Wider National Coordinator are also outlined in **Annex A**.

Year Three Expenditure

- 9 HEFCW confirmed with Partnerships (December 2004) that any uncommitted year three underspend should be returned to HEFCW and this would impact on future funding decisions. As a result, in 2006/07 the North Wales Partnership received £61k less funding than requested as it continued to carry underspend. The South East Wales Partnership requested virement into its 2006/07 budget of approximately 1.1% (£10,875) of its (£950k) year three budget, whilst the South West Wales and West and Mid Wales Partnerships were on budget.
- 10 Managing short-term allocations, received on a financial year basis for work undertaken with partners working on an academic year, has caused difficulties for all Partnerships. Therefore, the third funding allocation was for a sixteen month period to align with the academic year (April 2005 – July 2006). The two year funding for 2006/08 will, we anticipate, further facilitate financial planning.

Council is invited to note progress with the Reaching Wider Initiative

All Wales Activities

- 11 In September 2006 Council agreed to increase funding to a maximum of £400k to 'roll-out' Wales-wide the two pilot All-Wales projects (Hands on Science: South East Wales; BME workshop models: South West Wales). The budget was increased as discussions

with lead Partnerships indicated that extending the two All-Wales Activities across Wales might cost approximately £200k per Partnership each year for two years.

- 12 On receipt of satisfactory pilot reports and extension proposals, the Chief Executive approved All Wales extension funding totalling £350k for 2006/08 for the two projects (November 2006), plus pilot funding of £27,500 for the satisfactorily revised third proposal (January 2007).

Council is invited to note the allocation, via delegated authority, of £350k for 2006/08 for the extension across Wales of All Wales Activities by two Reaching Wider Partnerships and the allocation of £27,500 pilot funding for the third proposal.

Articulation Strategies

- 13 All Reaching Wider Partnerships contributed to the eleven articulation strategies submitted by HEIs to HEFCW in November 2006. Trinity College is yet to submit its articulation strategy due to the continuing uncertainty surrounding its Partnership membership. The articulation strategies illustrated the methods of, and extent to which, institutions coordinate widening access and Reaching Wider funded activities within their regions. Of particular significance were examples of how added value, efficiency gains and complementarity were achieved. One HEI credited its Partnership with creating 'a greater awareness of the needs of future students and, as a result, [the HEI] is placing particular emphasis upon extending its student support mechanisms ...'
- 14 The Articulation Strategies cited the following examples of good practice resulting from closer collaboration between widening access and Reaching Wider:
- The development of new provision within the context of existing institutional strategies and Assembly priorities.
 - The increased focus on 'in-reach' strategies within HEIs' to raise the profile of widening access and Partnership activities, to share innovation and best practice and improve the standards of outreach working.
 - The use of Partnerships' critical audits to inform widening access developments.
 - The joint provision of widening access opportunities at different stages of the school/college students' learning experience (funded by Partnerships or HEIs) to ensure continuously available learning opportunities.

Council is invited to note progress towards the closer alignment of widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15 There are no financial implications to this paper.

PUBLICITY IMPLICATIONS

- 16 There are no publicity implications.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- 17 The table below identifies some of the key risks in progressing this work:

Risk	Risk Level Probability/Impact L=low, m=medium, h=high	Risk Management We will manage the risk by:
Partnerships fail to make sufficient progress towards the Reaching Higher widening access targets by not setting and achieving aspirational targets.	m/h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to maintain a robust approach to coordination. • Responding to the findings of the national evaluation as appropriate.
Partnerships fail to work collaboratively to ensure value is added to existing HE and	m/m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to monitor alignment with HEIs' institutional and

other widening access provision.		other key strategic plans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing progress against the articulation strategies. Also the National Coordinator is now also responsible for the widening access policy area.
Uncertain medium- to long-term funding prevents strategic planning and negatively affects staff morale and the positive impetus of the initiative	m/m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining discussions with the Assembly on these issues.
Insufficient Partnership 'buy-in' to All Wales Activities	l/m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Releasing funding subject to satisfactory progress reports. • Coordinating an All Wales Activities Steering Group.

DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 18 The information in this paper covers a broad range of issues which relate to diversity and equal opportunities such as: under-representation in and access to higher education for those with the ability to benefit from it; provision for disabled students; and race equality. Officers will continue to work with the Partnerships to ensure progress towards the widening access *Reaching Higher* targets. Guidance on future strategy development will emphasise the importance of Partnerships continuing to prioritise these issues, especially where statutory responsibilities are involved, and to see the Reaching Wider initiative as part of a broader, integrated approach to equal opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 19 Council is invited to:
- i. note progress with the Reaching Wider Initiative
 - ii. note the allocation, via delegated authority, of £350k for 2006/08 for the extension across Wales of All Wales Activities by two Reaching Wider Partnerships and the allocation of £27,500 pilot funding for the third proposal.
 - iii. note progress towards the closer alignment of widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative

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Reaching Wider Partnership Activities and the National Coordinator's Key Actions in 2005/06

INTRODUCTION

1. This annex provides further information on: the activities of the Reaching Wider Partnerships and the work of the Reaching Wider National Coordinator during the period April 2005 to March 2006.

PARTNERSHIPS' KEY DEVELOPMENTS

2. Year three Partnership proposals and targets were directly related to the Assembly's four widening access targets. Whilst some key activities are outlined in the main body of this report, established activities include the following:

Partnership	Activities
North Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition workshops to support primary pupils with progression to secondary school; • Mentoring and peer mentoring to raise skills and aspirations, • Bilingual critical thinking workshops to raise skills; • Bilingual Ladders workshops with Careers Wales to raise career aspirations; • Welsh medium summer schools in partnership with First Campus; • Welsh medium family and community learning provision; • Taste of University Life and Winter College (campus-based events); • Sign language skills work with disabled students to facilitate progression to level 3 studies.
Mid and West Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wales Summer University (6 weeks' residential experience); • Expanding Horizons (GCSE revision); • After School Clubs in science, archaeology, maths, personal transferable skills and citizenship; • Taste of University Life events (residential/non-residential options)
South East Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and e-mentoring to raise skills and aspirations; • Critical Thinking sessions; • Community and family learning programmes; • Workshops to raise aspirations eg robotics, forensic skills, modern languages, food technology, music, creative writing, media; • Lead partner for the All Wales Activities 'Hands on Science' provision.
South West Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and Easter revision courses for skills raising • Aiming for a College Education and Taste of University Life days (aspiration raising); • FE focused Taster Days; • Wales Summer University provision; • Lead partner for the All Wales Activities WAW workshops (workshop models for working with black and other ethnic minority families).

NATIONAL COORDINATOR'S KEY ACTIVITIES

3. Key activities during this period include:
 - Negotiating changes to agreed targets, budgets and activities with Partnerships;
 - Providing the secretariat for the National Steering Group, the newly formed Widening Access Council sub-committee, RW Practitioners' Group and regularly reporting to Partnership management and operational groups;
 - Disseminating good practice in widening access;
 - Representing HEFCW on HEFCE, UCAS and other steering/consultation groups;
 - Raising the profile of RW through the development of the RW national conferences, the Welsh launch of the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark in Higher Education and the Care Leavers in Higher Education Conference;
 - Consulting with WAG and other agencies on the wide range of policy developments that affect RW including proposed changes to the Reaching Higher Communities First target;
 - Working with the National Reaching Wider Officer to support the central coordination of the Reaching Wider initiative.