

Meeting
19/09/07

Agenda Item
24

Reference No
HEFCW/07/81

1 Issue

This paper updates Council on key developments relating to institutions' widening access strategies 2006/09, including disability provision plans, and, articulation strategies, and it confirms widening access strategy fund allocations for 2007/08.

2 Rationale for the paper

Council allocates funding annually to support the implementation of institutions' strategies for widening access and for disability provision plans and Council receives annual progress reports.

In March 2006 Council agreed to provide £750k from Reaching Higher Reaching Wider funding to support the further alignment of widening access and Reaching Wider activities in response to our 2005-06 remit letter requesting us to ensure 'closer alignment between widening access strategies and the [Reaching Wider] partnerships' strategies'. This paper updates Council on institutions' progress with the range of widening access work.

3 Recommendation(s)

The Council is invited to:

- i. note institutions' progress with and planned developments in widening, access provision;
- ii. note the Chief Executive's approval, under delegated authority, of the 2007/08 institutional widening access strategy allocations.

4 Timing for decisions

There are no timing implications.

5 Council members' interests

No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

For further information contact Jane Johns (Tel 02920 682 219; E-mail: Jane.Johns@hefcw.ac.uk).

7 Background

WIDENING ACCESS STRATEGIES AND FUNDING

Council's March 2006 meeting delegated authority to the Chief Executive to approve widening access funding annual allocations for the new three year strategy period (2006/09), subject to satisfactory annual monitoring statement (AMS) reports. The total funding for 2007/08 was £1,794,212. This amount included £5,000 for us to cover incidental widening access-related programme expenses.

DISABILITY PROVISION PLANS

Institutions submitted 2005/06 disability provision plans and detailed their 2006/07 objectives for further disability work. During this period institutions were required to take account of their statutory obligations under the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act.

ARTICULATION STRATEGIES

Since the Reaching Wider initiative began we have discussed with the sector the need for closer alignment between widening access and Reaching Wider activities to ensure that widening access provision is more strategically coordinated within Partnership regions. The articulation strategies set out institutions' progress towards closer alignment with Reaching Wider.

SECTOR RESPONSES

Most widening access strategies and articulation strategies were submitted on time, however, some strategies were delayed due to the impact of Trinity College, Carmarthen's move to the South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnership and subsequent discussions on the potential for merger between the West and Mid Wales and the South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnerships.

8 Sector Progress on Widening Access and Future Funding

Generic feedback reports on institution's 2006/09 widening access strategies and disability provision plans are attached as **Annexes A and B**. The reports note that:

- we welcomed the fact that the majority of widening access and disability provision plans were developed through institution-wide consultation and informed by institutional and other strategic plans;
- most institutions contextualised their widening access past and planned performance against the UK-wide performance indicators and continued to respond positively to equalities issues. However, the extent to which institutions also referenced their strategies against the Welsh Assembly Government's *Reaching Higher* widening access priorities varied considerably;

- there continued to be a strong focus on, and increased awareness of, the need for partnership working, in addition to the substantial contribution that institutions made to the Reaching Wider Initiative. Work with certain groups, such as looked after children and care leavers, was often identified as more effectively achieved through partnership working;
- most strategies included some work-related and personal transferable skills provision, including the development of two new Foundation Degree centres, and we welcomed this positive response to the emerging Leitch agenda and changing demographics;
- student support and retention actions played a significant part in both the widening access and disability provision plans with one institution submitting a widening access and retention strategy’;
- we identified examples of good practice in disability provision including engaging senior staff in disability planning and increasing the support for disabled students while their funding applications for support were being processed.

A generic feedback report on institutions’ articulation strategies is attached as **Annex C**. Key features of closer alignment between widening access activities and Reaching Wider include:

- Reaching Wider innovative provision and good practice had been adopted by institutions;
- collaborative Partnership working had generated high-quality widening access materials and avoided duplication of provision;
- partnership working had resulted in a shared representation on regional networks, thus demonstrating mature partnership working;
- progression opportunities had been created by closer FE/HE working;

Widening access strategy allocations for 2007/08, approved by the Chief Executive under delegated authority, are attached as **Annex D**.

9 Financial implications

As Council has already agreed the widening access allocations there are no further financial implications arising from this paper.

10 Communications implications

The generic feedback reports attached to this paper will be published in September 2007, together with institutional widening access allocations 2007/08.

11 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

Diversity and equality of opportunity is central to widening access policy development. Our feedback to the sector on these widening access and

disability reports and the 2007/08 widening access funding should directly contribute to a diverse student population effectively supported to reach their full potential.

12 Risk Assessment

Risk	Management of Risk We would manage this risk by:
The sector's widening access strategies and disability plans are unsuccessful and fail to make progress against the <i>Reaching Higher</i> widening access targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring closely institutions' annual monitoring statements. ▪ Seeking Widening Access Committee advice on widening access policy development and implementation. ▪ Using the consultation process to ensure sector-wide 'buy-in'.