

Meeting
12/12/08

Agenda Item
21

Reference No
HEFCW/08/99

1 Issue

- 1.1 This paper provides Council with a summary of the potential implications for HE of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) policy agenda '*Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*'.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 This paper provides the Council with a summary of the implications of the WAG Transforming Education and Training policy agenda for HE, including on the HEFCW policy areas of Reconfiguration and Collaboration and Reaching Wider. The Corporate Plan includes the strategic priorities of delivering a successful programme of Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund projects to underpin effective collaboration between HEIs in all areas of activity. It also contains a number of priorities that address equality of opportunity, social inclusion and offering flexible and accessible higher education provision, through the '*Reaching Wider*' agenda.

3 Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. Note the WAG policy '*Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*' and its potential implications for HE.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 No decisions are required at this meeting.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No conflicts of interest have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

- 6.1 Contact Dr Ewen Brierley (Tel 029 2068 2291; E-mail: ewen.brierley@hefcw.ac.uk).

7 Background

- 7.1 The WAG skills strategy, '*Skills that work for Wales: a skills and employment strategy and action plan*', was published in July 2008 (this is available at http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en). This strategy provided a WAG response to Lord Leitch's review of skills in the UK and Sir Adrian Webb's review of the mission and purpose of further education (FE) in Wales.
- 7.2 In order to deliver against this skills strategy, WAG published the policy document '*Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales: Delivering Skills that Work for Wales*' in September 2008 (attached at **Annex A**). It should be noted that HEFCW officers were not consulted in the development of this policy document.

8 The Transformation Policy

- 8.1 The WAG policy document at Annex A has the overall aim of improving outcomes for learners by transforming provision through partnerships and networks of providers. It challenges everyone involved in the management and provision of post-compulsory education and training in Wales to work together to transform the network of providers so that we:
- widen the options available for students at 14-19 in a way that prepares young people for the full range of pathways open to them and that respects the different learning styles of those students;
 - reduce unnecessary duplication of provision by increased levels of collaborative curriculum planning and delivery; and
 - move to excellence across networks of providers, building on the progress made by individual providers in raising the quality of institutional management and of students' learning experience.
- 8.2 The principal elements of the policy document that impact on HE are detailed below:
- '*We will require further and higher education institutions and work-based learning providers to continue to concentrate on working with 14-19 networks to fulfil the requirements of expanding local opportunities for all, and to work together to create and expand much needed progression routes. They should collaborate to establish regional networks of post-16 and post-19 skills specialisms, based on sector priorities; set up skills centres of excellence where appropriate; launch appropriate foundation degrees; and merge or form formal federations where this will maximise learner benefits*' (page 3, para 13)
 - '*We expect relevant local authorities and further and higher education institutions, working with officials from the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), to take the lead on swiftly achieving the transformation we seek. Where plans involve schools and school sixth forms the local authority will be the most appropriate body to take the lead. In other circumstances a specific college or university will be better placed to direct and manage transformation*' (page 3, para 15)

- *'Higher education institutions may also wish to improve their current partnership arrangements'* (page 3, para 16)
- *'We recognise that several local authorities, colleges and universities are already well advanced in their plans to transform education and training provision, to meet the needs of learners, and we will continue to work with these stakeholders to implement such plans in a timely manner'* (page 4, para 19)
- *'There is more scope for universities to play a further role in a fully integrated learning network. This will involve the development of more university and college links; a focus on expanding much needed vocational and skill-based progression routes; developing specialisms; and the establishment of clear entry and exit points for all post-18 learners. The refresh of Reaching Higher, the Assembly Government's ten-year strategy for higher education, is to be progressed in the context of this agenda'* (page 7, para 22).
- *'The Assembly Government is already taking the lead on improving the delivery of Adult Community Learning, in association with relevant providers. For this area of delivery we believe that the Webb consortium model has merit. Our proposed option is to create Adult Community Learning Partnerships across Wales for the delivery of Assembly Government-funded provision and we will consult on this in September 2008.'* (page 16, para 50).
- *'The proposal is that each Learning Partnership will be responsible for planning and funding Adult Community Learning provision in a specified geographical area. It is envisaged that the learning partnerships will include representation from further education institutions, local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations. This will provide greater opportunity to extend partnership working in the delivery of Adult Community Learning. We will be exploring options to integrate these Learning Partnerships with existing planning processes and networks, for example the higher education-based Reaching Wider Partnerships, in order to avoid duplication of effort where possible'* (page 16, para 51).

8.3 The policy document proposes four potential models of learning partnership, which are:

- The development of 16-19 schools provision, in partnership with the FE sector, establishing a tertiary system for post-16 learning delivery where, appropriate;
- The development of work-based learning provision, involving FEIs, training providers and employers;
- Informal and formal partnerships between FEIs, or FEIs and HEIs, including mergers; and
- Adult community learning partnerships.

The development of informal or formal partnerships between FEIs and HEIs, including collaborative arrangements and mergers, is likely to be the model with the greatest relevance to the HE sector. At the time of writing, WAG officials were contacting all local authorities, FEIs and HEIs to discuss ways in which the policy might be implemented in each locality, and to support the

development of learning partnership proposals. Providers have been requested to submit strategic outline programme 'proposals' for learning partnerships by 15 January 2009. As they are progressed, all bids for learning partnerships will need to conform to the Office of Government Commerce's 'Five-Case Model'. This is comprised of the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management cases for support.

- 8.4 As outlined above, the policy indicates that HEIs might wish to further develop their existing links with FEIs. Many HEIs already have informal or formal partnership arrangements with FEIs, e.g. the FE2HE Consortium involving UWIC, Barry College, Bridgend College, Coleg Glan Hafren and The College, Ystrad Mynach, which aims to provide students in South East Wales with flexible learning opportunities from sub-degree level to undergraduate and beyond. The policy may provide the opportunity to build on the foundations of the existing High Level Skills Training Consortia involving HEIs, FEIs and the Sector Skills Councils, which were supported by the Knowledge Exploitation Fund (KEF). Sectors covered by these High Level Training Consortia include: Micro and Nano Technology; Interactive Digital Media; and Print. The successor fund to the KEF, the Academic Expertise for Business (A4B) scheme, will not provide a continuation of funding for these consortia as it does not cover skills, although WAG officials are currently looking at other options for drawing on EU funding to take forward such developments. In addition, all HEIs have formal arrangements with FEIs and schools through their regional HEFCW-funded *Reaching Wider* Partnerships.
- 8.5 Whilst such partnership arrangements may stimulate progression from FE to HE, and contribute to the delivery of skills, they are unlikely to achieve the level of landscape change in HE that could warrant support from the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund. In contrast, provided that they deliver substantial benefits for HE, HE-FE mergers may be eligible for Reconfiguration and Collaboration support, e.g. the integration of Merthyr Tydfil College into the University of Glamorgan. The HE aspects of this merger were supported with £242k to upgrade ICT and library facilities for HE learners at Merthyr Tydfil. Even if a number of similar merger proposals were forthcoming, as HEFCW may only contribute to the HE related costs, this policy is unlikely to have more than a minor impact on the overall Reconfiguration and Collaboration budget. However, in the context of the current financial pressure on the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund, it may be difficult to prioritise such developments over more substantial HE-HE partnerships.
- 8.6 Perhaps more significant than the availability of funding for nascent HE-FE mergers is the potential for tension between such developments and existing, or developing, HE-HE partnerships, as has previously been reported to Council. It is unlikely that such HE-FE mergers will impact on the legal status of Higher Education Corporations (as defined by the Education Reform Act, 1988). Were a merger to reduce the FTE enrolment number for HE courses at an institution to below 55 per cent of its total FTE enrolment numbers, there might be some potential for the institution's standing in the sector to draw into question. This is particularly likely to be the case if an institution has only recently been granted taught degree awarding powers and university title, although its university status would be unlikely to change if it continued to meet the criteria for award of university title (i.e. possessing taught degree

awarding powers and having at least 4,000 FTE HE students, of whom at least 3,000 are registered on degree level courses, including foundation degree programmes).

- 8.7 The WAG policy document also has potential implications for the *Reaching Wider* agenda, as it encourages proposed Adult Community Learning partnerships to integrate with existing HEFCW-funded *Reaching Wider* partnerships in order to avoid duplication of effort. A separate WAG consultation is also currently taking place on Adult and Community Learning, with this to close on 31 December 2008 (This is available at <http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultations/education/adultcommunitylearning/?lang=en>). These raise potential questions about the remit and ambitions of the *Reaching Wider* partnerships, including whether they should engage with: all age groups; young people from primary and/or secondary school age upwards; post-16 learners; and adults, particularly developing skills and vocational learning. It also draws into question the structure of the *Reaching Wider* partnerships, how they will be funded and the measures that may be used to assess progress. HEFCW officers are to provide a response to the consultation on Adult and Community Learning in due course.
- 8.8 There may be further implications for the HE sector that will become clear following the refresh of the *Reaching Higher* strategy for HE in Wales and the outcome of the consultation on Adult and Community Learning. The refresh of *Reaching Higher* is to be progressed in the context of the '*Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*' agenda.
- 8.9 At the time of writing, WAG officials were meeting with local authorities, FEIs and HEIs to discuss the implementation of the transformation policy in each locality. HEFCW officers were to meet with WAG officials in late November to discuss the transformation agenda and its implications for HE.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 In the absence of additional Reconfiguration and Collaboration funding, a sharper prioritisation of proposals to the Fund than hitherto has been required. Potential HE-FE merger proposals developed as a result of this WAG policy will therefore need to be prioritised against other bids submitted to the Fund.

10 Communications implications

- 10.1 Any changes to HEFCW policy as a result of the *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*' agenda and related refresh of *Reaching Higher* will need to be communicated to the HE sector.

11 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 11.1 It is intended that the policy will impact on diversity and equality of opportunities through increased progression to HE in under-represented groups.

12 Risk Assessment

- 12.1 Risks associated with individual HE-FE partnerships would be assessed at the proposal stage and handled as part of both the approvals and project monitoring processes. The overall risks relating to the operation of the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund in this context are outlined below.

RISK	ACTION TO ADDRESS RISK
An inability to support all HE-FE merger proposals due to the limited Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund budget.	Prioritisation of full proposals based on the impact on strategic priorities and the urgency of timescale.
Tension between HE-HE partnerships (both current and proposed) and HE-FE partnership developments.	Liaison with institutions and WAG to ensure that HE-FE developments do not cut across HE-HE partnerships.