

Meeting
25/09/2009

Agenda Item
17

Reference No
HEFCW/09/77

1 Issue

- 1.1 This paper updates the Council on the progress of the Economic Support Initiative since its meeting on 8 May 2009.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 The 2009-10 Corporate Plan states that to benefit the economy and society HEFCW should deliver 'more productive relationships between higher education institutions and the public and private sectors, other agencies and local communities'. The Economic Support Initiative is drawing on relationships between institutions and other agencies, including the sector skills councils, to respond to the current economic turbulence by supporting individuals, communities and businesses across Wales. This paper provides the Council with an update on the progress of this Initiative.

3 Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The Council is invited to note the progress of the Economic Support Initiative.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 No decisions are required at this meeting.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No Council member has declared any further interests to those set out in the Register of members' interests which are of specific relevance to the matters covered in this paper.

6 Further information

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

7 Background

- 7.1 At its January 2009 meeting, Council delegated authority to the Chief Executive to identify a sum of money (maximum £2 million) from existing resources and to establish a fund to invest in sectoral activity designed to stimulate responses to the economic crisis. The Economic Support Initiative was subsequently launched in March 2009, with the following aims:
- To enable Welsh HEIs to further protect or improve the employment prospects of employees in the Welsh economy, the recently unemployed and graduates entering employment.
 - To assist the Welsh HE sector to support companies, including SMEs, by providing coordinated access to HE knowledge and expertise, in order to improve business performance and upskill their workforce.
- 7.2 Applications for the funding of developments in line with the above aims were invited, with bids to be considered for activities that do not compete with, displace, duplicate or substitute existing programmes operated by HEFCW or other key organisations in Wales.
- 7.3 Council was provided with an update on progress on submissions to the Initiative at its 8 May 2009 meeting.
- 7.4 A summative evaluation of the Initiative is to be undertaken in 2011. Discussions are currently taking place regarding a potential extension to the Initiative.

8 Update on Progress

- 8.1 Five proposals were received from:
- a. the St David's Day Alliance, led by Cardiff University;
 - b. a consortium of HE institutions led by the University of Wales;
 - c. a consortium of HE and FE institutions in South West Wales;
 - d. the Open University in Wales; and
 - e. a grouping based on the existing Skillset Screen Academy for Wales.
- 8.2 Following evaluation by the Executive of the above proposals against the Initiative criteria, with advice from Welsh Assembly Government officials in the Department for Economy and Transport, four projects were approved for support with a total value of £2.144 million. As this exceeded the level of funds allocated for the Initiative, the allocation of an additional £144k was approved by the Chair of Council and Chief Executive under delegated authority. The first tranche of this funding has been paid, with two further tranches including a final payment following the completion of the 18 month projects.
- 8.3 The proposal led by the University of Wales was not supported as Welsh Assembly Government officials had advised that the Innovation Voucher element of the proposal would substantially duplicate existing WAG activity under the Single Investment Fund. As the Innovation Voucher element was unsuitable for support and was the main element of the bid, it was considered that there was no basis for HEFCW support of the associated business network element of the project. An Innovation Voucher element of the St David's Day Alliance proposal was also not funded, but other elements of the bid were able to be supported.

St David's Day Alliance

- 8.4 Support was approved for the St David's Day Alliance project involving: Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Glamorgan and Swansea Universities; and also Glyndŵr University, at the level of £1,295,300. This project will deliver an Individual Learning Voucher scheme that will enable 1000 unemployed individuals to access education and training. It will also enable the partner institutions to expand careers guidance to widen cover to graduates, with an additional 3000 careers consultations to be undertaken during the funding period.

South West Wales Vocational Support Initiative

- 8.5 Support was approved at the level of £308,795 for the South West Wales Vocational Support Initiative project led by Trinity University College Carmarthen and involving: Swansea Metropolitan University; UW Lampeter; Pembrokeshire, Sir Gâr, Swansea, Gorseinon and Neath Port Talbot Colleges; Tourism Training for Wales/Gallu; Mid and West Wales Chambers of Commerce; Business in the Community Wales. The project will provide a coordinated approach to training and development activity in the South West Wales region, with a particular focus on up-skilling in the tourism and leisure industries. The programme of activity will include 45 training days, 17 seminars/workshops, enrolment of 140 individuals on accredited courses and will assist 55 businesses. The project will link with the ProAct and ReAct programmes.

Open University in Wales

- 8.6 The Open University in Wales has been provided with £100k support to develop a Welsh dimension to its existing recession website that will allow enquirers in Wales, especially those facing job-loss, the threat of job-loss or who wish to re-skill, up-skill or change career direction in the light of the current economic climate, to:
- receive employment-related individual information, advice and guidance about learning choices; and
 - undertake short flexible episodes of learning, including an online CPD course specific to the recession-needs of Wales. A total of 300 free CPD episodes will be made available to learners who are facing job-loss, the threat of job-loss or who wish to re-skill, up-skill or change career direction in the light of the current economic climate.

Skillset Screen Academy for Wales

- 8.7 The Skillset Screen Academy for Wales bid was approved at the level of £440,120. This project, led by the University of Glamorgan, includes: UW Newport; Aberystwyth, Cardiff and Swansea Metropolitan Universities; as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama; and Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the Creative Media Industry.
- 8.8 The project will address the skills and training needs of the Creative Media industries in Wales (Television, Film, Animation, Interactive Media, Facilities, Animation, Radio and Business Communications) through activities including:

- a. training, development and innovation support for creative media employees and freelancers who need to improve their skills, are unemployed or are at risk of redundancy;
- b. advice and support for the leadership teams of creative companies;
- c. development of the knowledge and skills of content producers;
- d. provision of tailored programmes to assist creative media companies to develop the skills and behaviours required for interactive production, sales and marketing;
- e. a portfolio of short courses to help individuals develop new skills to sustain their existing employment or gain employment; and
- f. support for recent graduates to access training and experience.

9 Financial implications

- 9.1 The £2.144 allocated to the Economic Support Initiative has been drawn from: the Strategic Development Fund (£1.2 million); GO Wales (£400k); funds set aside for the strategic use of core funding (£400k); and contingency funds (£144k). Subject to any discussions regarding an extension to the Economic Support Initiative, it is unlikely that any additional funds will be required.

10 Communications implications

- 10.1 Details of projects supported under the Economic Support Initiative may be made available through press activity, in collaboration with the partner institutions.

11 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 11.1 Institutions will be expected to give due consideration to age, disability, gender, race, religious belief and sexual orientation issues in all Economic Support Initiative developments.

12 Risk Assessment

- 12.1 Risks associated with individual projects are assessed at the proposal stage and handled as part of the project monitoring process. The overall risks relating to the operation of the Initiative are outlined below.

RISK	ACTION TO ADDRESS RISK
Failure of the Economic Support Initiative to achieve satisfactory impact.	<p>Approval of projects with realistic outcomes and, where appropriate, linkage with business/industry bodies.</p> <p>Monitoring of approved projects to ensure outcomes are achieved.</p>