

Press release

Date: 20 October 2006

Title: Universities invest in communities' education

A major investment to support regeneration and education in the Heads of the Valleys area in South Wales has been announced today.

£1.5m will be shared between the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, Newport for a two-year project to broaden the higher education opportunities available to residents of the South Wales Valleys.

The funding, awarded through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales's (HEFCW) Strategic Development Fund, will be used to finance a number of initiatives which will give local people an opportunity to experience university education or gain knowledge which would help them to pursue a higher education qualification.

The two universities will provide learning opportunities at the core of some of our most disadvantaged communities with schemes such as 'Science Shops', building on work already started through the Community University of the Valleys.

The Science Shops – the first of their kind in England and Wales - will be available in venues such as shopping centres, where tutors, researchers and students will help local groups solve problems by using hands-on scientific methods. They will also give local people the opportunity to develop their skills, which could help them progress to more formal, community-based accredited courses.

Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Jane Davidson, said:

"Widening access to higher education, particularly in communities where engagement with HE is comparatively low, is a major priority for the Welsh Assembly Government. I

am pleased that we are able to support this development, playing, as it does, to the main strengths which the two institutions have to offer.

“Both the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, Newport have strong track records in this type of activity. I am especially pleased to see these institutions collaborating in a way which fits with the ethos of our strategy for higher education, *Reaching Higher*.”

Chair of HEFCW, Professor Sir Roger Williams, said:

"We have long been concerned about the accessibility of higher education opportunities to the communities of the South Wales Valleys. Coming from Tredegar, this holds particular significance for me. I am delighted that we were able to find the funding to get behind these two institutions to expand considerably their excellent work in this area."

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Strategic Development Fund (SDF)

The Strategic Development Fund (SDF) was established a year ago to offer financial support to underpin interventions HEFCW makes with the higher education sector in support of the Council's strategic priorities.

The investment can be seen against the backdrop of the Welsh Assembly Government's 10 year strategy for higher education, *Reaching Higher*, which focuses on the need to widen access and to encourage significant developments in collaboration and reconfiguration of higher education in Wales.

Science Shops

The collaboration between the two universities provides for people in Valleys communities to access local 'science shops' for community problem solving and, if they

wish, to progress through informal learning onto community-based accredited university courses. Science shops and associated learning opportunities are to be based in accessible venues such as shopping centres, and will take the expertise of university tutors, researchers and students straight to the heart of some of our most disadvantaged communities.

The University of Glamorgan's Centre for Astronomy and Science Education (CASE) website explains that "Community and voluntary groups often require specialist skills to develop their work. A Science Shop is a link between a university and the community that can put community groups in touch with scientists and students who might be able to work with them.

"Science shops stand at the junction where science meets society. These grassroots research organisations deal with practical scientific problems at the local community level. Although they cater for the community, science shops are not really 'shops' in the traditional sense of the word. They carry out scientific research in a wide range of disciplines – usually free of charge – on behalf of citizens and local civil society. Science shops provide independent, participatory research support to community groups on a demand driven and affordable basis, and promote and support public access to, and public influence on, science, research and technology."

Community University of the Valleys

The Community University of the Valleys-East (CUV East) is an initiative of the University of Wales, Newport and was set up with European Regional Development Funding during 2000. Since then more than 900 people have returned to learning by studying the 'standalone' Higher Education courses. The majority of these people had little or no previous qualifications. CUV East operates in 14 [community venues](#) across Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen . The locations include Pontypool, Garndiffaith, Caerphilly, Markham, Tredegar and Ebbw Vale.

It offers a wide choice of ['stand alone' modules](#) within the framework of the University's [Certificate of Higher Education - Combined Open Studies](#) programme in Humanities, Social Sciences and Computing. Modules are delivered during school term time to fit in with school hours and free childcare is provided. Enrolment takes place every term and

students can choose the number of modules they wish to take at any one time. People are attracted to Higher Education by the nature of the provision in their local communities. This combined with the timing of the courses enables them to study as well as fulfill their family and other commitments.

Students are offered [additional support](#) such as a weekly computer club in several venues and study skills workshops. Many students have not studied for many years and so these facilities help them study for the module assignments or seminars.

Library facilities are available at two venues and book boxes are provided elsewhere. Internet access is provided at all venues.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) is an Assembly Sponsored Public Body, established in May 1992, which assumed responsibility for funding higher education in Wales on 1 April 1993.

Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Council is responsible for the administration of funds made available by the Assembly in support of the provision of education, the undertaking of research by higher education institutions, and the provision of prescribed courses of higher education at further education institutions.

Under the Education Act 1994, the Council is responsible for accrediting providers of initial teaching training for school teachers and commissioning research to improve the standards of teachers and teacher training.

In addition to its funding responsibilities, the Council provides advice to the Welsh Assembly Government on the funding needs, aspirations and concerns of the higher education sector in Wales.