

Press release

Date: 3 November 2009

Title: Weighing up the future of widening access

Social justice and lifelong learning were the main themes of a high level policy discussion between Welsh universities and colleges and officials from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) today.

The meeting will contribute to shaping the future of widening access to higher education in Wales from 2010.

Professor Philip Gummett, Chief Executive of HEFCW, said: "HEFCW, universities and colleges remain committed to contributing to the further development of the Welsh economy by working closely with individuals and communities without a tradition of higher education or higher level skills. We are also keen to promote a buoyant and sustainable economy.

"These commitments support the Education Minister's recognition that widening access to HE to students from non-traditional backgrounds is a strength of universities and colleges in Wales, and that widening access itself needed to be more closely aligned with developing the Welsh economy and promoting social justice."

Today's discussions focused on issues raised in the two higher education review reports by Professor Merfyn Jones published earlier this year, and the Higher Education Academy's widening access review published in late October.

The strategic dialogue with the sector will contribute to ongoing development of the Welsh Assembly Government's new strategy for universities and colleges, which is due to be published later this month.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to increasing opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to access higher education through its promotion of social justice and lifelong learning for all.

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Notes:

Contacts for further information

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The joint Higher Education Academy / HEFCW meeting, The Future of Widening Access in Wales, takes place on Tuesday 3 November 2009 in Llandrindod Wells.

In her statement of 22 June 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Jane Hutt, recognised the demonstrable strengths of higher education in Wales including high student satisfaction ratings, widening access to higher education for students from non-traditional backgrounds and a good performance in creating spin-outs and in patenting technologies. The Minister confirmed that the challenge for universities and colleges, when developing widening access provision, was to be more

strategically aligned with the *One Wales* themes of economic development and social justice.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) is an Assembly Government Sponsored Body responsible for administering funds made available by the Welsh Assembly Government in support of:

- education in higher education institutions (HEIs);
- research undertaken by HEIs; and
- higher education courses at further education colleges.

HEFCW is also 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, HEFCW provides advice to the Welsh Assembly Government on the funding needs, aspirations and concerns of the higher education sector in Wales.