

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 This circular:
  - announces the publication of the HEFCW-funded report, a *Strategic Review of Modern Language Provision in HEFCW-Funded Higher Education Institutions*; and
  - seeks views on the recommendations included in the report and future action.
- 2 We wish primarily to gather views from heads of institutions and senior managers from the higher education (HE) sector, in order to ensure that we understand their vision for the future shape of modern foreign languages (MFL) provision in HE in Wales, and how it can be facilitated with respect to the recommendations of the review report. We also welcome responses from others who are affected by, or interested in, future developments in this area, or who would wish to play a key role in helping to take forward the recommendations

## THE REPORT

- 3 HEFCW was remitted by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2003 to conduct a strategic review of modern language provision in the HE sector in Wales, following the publication of the Assembly's National Modern Foreign Languages Strategy, *Languages Count*. The review was to be undertaken in conjunction with Higher Education Wales (HEW), whose members are the heads of the higher education institutions in Wales, and CILT Cymru, the national centre for expertise in language teaching and research. Consultants Robert Huggins Associates were employed to undertake the review, which commenced in early 2004.
- 4 The broad aims of the review were:
  - i) to investigate the current state of modern language provision in the higher education sector in Wales, including student recruitment and funding support issues, including modern language initial teacher training (ITT) provision in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
  - ii) to consider past and future projected trends in the supply of, and demand for, such provision over a period of years and in comparison with similar provision across the UK and more widely;
  - iii) to identify options for the maintenance and development of modern language provision in HEIs in Wales, taking account of the remit of the Welsh Assembly Government, focussing on the period up to 2010.
- 5 The review was conducted in two parts: a quantitative study of the current state of MFL provision in the HE sector, allowing the consultants to map trends in provision in Wales; and a qualitative study. This included questionnaires to HEIs and face-to-face interviews.
- 6 HEFCW chose the event which launched the partnership between CILT Cymru and the Higher Education Academy's Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) subject centre in March 2005 to disseminate a number of quantitative findings from the review. The event was also used to discuss the emerging recommendations from the review.
- 7 We are now pleased to announce the publication of the report. The Executive Summary, which has been included with hard copies of this circular, provides an overview of the main findings. It also lists the report's recommendations, which are aimed at HEFCW, the Welsh Assembly Government, HEW, HE institutions and MFL departments. The full report and the executive summary can be viewed on the 2005 Circulars pages of the HEFCW website, [www.hefcw.ac.uk](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk). PDF copies can be emailed to you directly should you prefer.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- 8 The main qualitative findings are included in the attached executive summary. The review also found that:
- The decline in MFL full-time equivalents at HEIs in Wales between 1998/99 and 2001/02 was less marked than across the UK for the same period;
  - There has been a gradual increase in the proportion of MFL students studying on a part-time basis in recent years;
  - An increase in overall take-up on all MFL modules in Wales is contrasted with a substantial decline in England. This can be attributed to the growth of new joint honours courses and in non-specialist provision across Welsh HEIs;
  - MFL remained an attractive field of study for the highest achieving A-level students;
  - Numbers on PGCE MFL courses have increased, although trainees remain overwhelmingly female;
  - Whilst GCSE MFL numbers have dropped, take-up at A-level has increased. Welsh medium entries from both phases have increased;
  - Whilst MFL graduates enter a wide range of careers, the possession of language skills is considered a low priority by employers; and
  - At research level there is a mixed picture, with MFL departments improving their RAE ratings although the number of postgraduate students has fallen consistently during the period covered by the Review.

The report therefore indicates that, in many ways, the problems faced in Wales are less acute than elsewhere in the UK, although the success rates in recruiting to MFL courses vary between institutions. The report also identifies areas for concern and makes recommendations to address issues raised.

## THE CONSULTATION

- 9 Written responses are invited on how HEFCW, the Welsh Assembly Government, HE institutions and MFL departments, in partnership, as necessary, with graduate employers and organisations such as CILT Cymru and LLAS, should respond to the recommendations. We will also hold a consultation seminar on 3 October 2005 aimed primarily at senior managers in HEIs and those with knowledge of the institutional perspective on possible future developments in this area.
- 10 Feedback from the consultation will inform an action plan, to be produced by HEFCW in partnership with CILT Cymru and HEW in the autumn. A modest MFL development fund has been established by HEFCW to help HE institutions carry out, through collaboration with partners, some of the outcomes of this action plan, particularly in the areas of marketing, widening access and work with employers. Further details will be announced following the production of the action plan.
- 11 HEFCW will need to be mindful of the evolving context within which the action plan will be produced. Through HEFCW's 2005-06 remit letter, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning outlined her expectation that HEFCW keep abreast of the work going on in England to identify and protect strategically important subjects. She was also anxious that Wales-based students should not be deprived of the opportunity to study subjects which had a broader importance in a Welsh context. Accordingly, HEFCW will submit preliminary advice on those subjects which might fall into this category, and which might be difficult to sustain, and options on how to respond to this by the turn of the year.
- 12 Additional funding is potentially available to the HE sector through the HEFCW Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund (RCF) (HEFCW Circular W04/48HE). Support through this fund could: facilitate the rationalisation of provision between institutions where this could be shown to be of significant benefit to students, the maintenance or enhancement of the research base in Wales, or to the Welsh economy or society; or, support clusters and networks of excellence, whether in teaching, research or third mission activities, where these were substantial, sustainable, had unified management structures

and the capacity to deliver greater benefits than institutions acting alone. Further information can be found at [www.hefcw.ac.uk](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk) on the Reconfiguration and Collaboration pages.

- 13 Respondents are invited to provide feedback on any or all of the recommendations found in the report. A full list is in the executive summary and in the full report. We particularly welcome responses to the specific questions included in this circular.

## THE CONSULTATION

- 14 The Council particularly wishes to consult on three categories of recommendations:

**SECTION A:** recommendations for action by HEFCW/Welsh Assembly Government;

**SECTION B:** recommendations for action by higher education institutions; and

**SECTION C:** recommendations for action by Modern Foreign Language Departments.

### ***SECTION A: Recommendations for action by HEFCW/Welsh Assembly Government***

#### ***A.i. Strategic and funding issues***

- 15 The report recommends that a national programme of joint action is necessary to pursue any future strategies for MFL provision at HE level. Overall objectives, joint projects and collaboration would need to be co-ordinated at national level, within a broader, outward-looking, European context, whilst institutions would need to tackle the needs, status and future planning of individual schools, departments and languages. Within this context, the report recommends that national guidelines be developed to ensure clear, institution-wide funding of non-specialist courses to provide a coherent structure for institutions and departments to work in.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The National Assembly and HEFCW should work together with institutions and other actors to develop a strategy for future HE MFL provision that is coherent across institutions and recognises the diversity of provision and modes of delivery.

#### **Recommendation 37**

There is a need to develop guidelines to encourage a transparent and coherent system of institution-wide funding of non-specialist MFL courses. HEFCW and HEW could take the lead in this.

#### **Recommendation 36**

HEFCW should include a review of funding provision for MFL within its consideration of the Assembly's remit on subjects of a broader importance in a Welsh context, including funding for both specialist and non-specialist provision.

Q1 ***Within the overall agenda of subjects of a broader importance in a Welsh context, does Wales require the development of an overarching strategy specifically for MFL in HE?***

Q2 ***Given HEFCW's view that structural solutions are to be preferred to isolated adjustments to the funding model with regard to subjects of a broader importance, what advice can you offer on possible structural approaches to strengthen MFL?***

### **A.ii. Widening access**

- 16 The report shows that a lower proportion of Welsh MFL students in UK HEIs come from lower socio-economic classifications than for other subjects. The report found that, despite a number of examples of good practice in Wales relating to widening access to language learning, MFL departments have occasionally been slow to recognise the potential to increase demand through widening access activities. The HEFCW-funded Reaching Wider partnerships could provide a vehicle for further developments in this area.

#### **Recommendation 16**

HEFCW should work with the HEA LLAS Subject Centre, UCML [University Council of Modern Languages] and CILT Cymru to ensure that institutions in Wales have access to good practice and successful case studies relating to widening participation through language learning. Guidelines could also be issued to HEIs detailing lessons learned from previous initiatives and projects in addressing some of the challenges outlined above.

- Q3 ***What measures might be taken to widen access to MFL courses at HE level, including building upon current examples of good practice, links to FE and better integration with Reaching Wider partnerships?***

### **A.iii. Distance learning**

- 17 The report notes that distance learning offers a potential opportunity for MFL departments to enhance current provision, to offer new courses and to work in tandem with other MFL departments, either as part of a strategic alliance in delivering MFL or through sharing students and delivering joint courses. Not all MFL departments have engaged in provision through distance learning, although this could offer scope for them to collaborate. As most of the development of distance learning for languages has come from the Open University, recommendation 24 states:

#### **Recommendation 24**

HEFCW should consider the potential role of the Open University in establishing joint partnerships and developing a national distance learning strategy for MFL in Wales

- Q4 ***How could HEFCW assist HEIs to best apply new technologies and access new markets through collaboration, including with the Open University in Wales, in the area of distance learning?***

## **SECTION B: Recommendations for action by higher education institutions**

### **B.i. Collaborative action**

- 18 Some recommendations in the report can be taken forward only if a clear lead is taken by the HEIs themselves. The report suggests that HEIs should develop new methods of partnership by encouraging a wider culture of collaboration, which could link to additional provision to meet specialist and niche demand. Partnership will, indeed, be the key focus of any strategies to sustain and increase MFL provision. As part of the vision for increasing collaboration between HEIs, heads of HEIs might wish to consider the feasibility of funding significant collaborative work in MFL in HE in Wales via proposals to the HEFCW Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund.

**Recommendation 7**

Institutions should consider the potential for a series of joint institutional initiatives and courses that broaden the range of specialist and non-specialist MFL provision in Welsh HEIs. One mechanism for promoting and formally supporting collaboration is the HEFCW Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund.

Q5 ***How can collaborative action be taken forward through the HEFCW Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund?***

- 19 The report talks of an increase in 'fixed term' or 'casual' members of staff delivering MFL, which can fill gaps in provision.

**Recommendation 39**

There is a need to address the trend towards the 'casualisation' of labour in MFL departments. Institutions should explore potential staff sharing measures in tandem with development of joint provision.

Q6 ***How could HEIs work together to develop joint provision/staffing, perhaps through new or existing departmental, institutional or collaborative strategies?***

- 20 The report suggests opportunities through the further development of networks between institutions, FE and schools to promote MFL.

**Recommendation 18**

HEIs should consider joint partnerships with training organisations and further education institutions to develop MFL access courses.

Q7 ***How could the links with FEIs and training organisations be made by HEIs?***

- 21 The report suggests that MFL departments should ensure that employers recognise the value of language skills and the qualities that language graduates bring to the workplace. Collaborative developments between employers and HEIs could be particularly significant in encouraging language learning at HE level in Wales.

**Recommendation 35**

The educational achievements of MFL undergraduates and graduates should be better promoted to employers. This can be undertaken as part of a wider promotional and marketing strategy on the benefits of MFL and could be undertaken by a partnership of institutions, employers and government agencies.

Q8 ***How could institutions take forward this recommendation with careers, employer and training organisations?***

**B.ii. The year abroad**

- 22 The report suggests that a minority of departments have been under pressure to discontinue or cut back on the compulsory year abroad, often due to cost or administration issues within the institution or to the financial or time constraints of some part time students. However, employers and academics recognise the additional professional, educational and life skills that the year abroad can offer students and how exchanges can raise the profile of the institution internationally.

**Recommendation 13**

The year abroad should remain a key element of MFL courses and should be marketed and recognised as such by institutions.

**Recommendation 17**

Institutions should consider the provision of language bursaries for students from less well off backgrounds to offset the additional cost of the year abroad and the resultant four year course. This could serve as an additional marketing tool for MFL courses and as part of any widening access agenda initiatives.

Q9 ***If the year abroad should remain a key element of MFL courses in HE, how could it be made more attractive to all students in order to increase general participation, as well as help widen access to MFL courses?***

**B.iii. International strategies**

- 23 The report suggests that tying in MFL departments with institutions' corporate and international development strategies is a good promotional tool to attract students. Further, MFL departments can provide expertise and contacts for potential European collaborative projects, provide a focus for links to overseas business and enhance the international reputation of institutions.

**Recommendation 32**

The potential role of MFL departments should be given careful consideration as part of any corporate and international development strategies of HE institutions, particularly those which seek to promote the institution and its courses overseas.

Q10 ***How might MFL departments contribute to the development of institutional corporate and international development strategies?***

**SECTION C: Recommendations for action by Modern Foreign Language Departments****C.i. Individual and collaborative action**

- 24 A number of recommendations can be taken forward by the MFL departments themselves, either individually or in collaboration with other HEIs or relevant organisations, building on current initiatives. Innovation in marketing approaches should be further encouraged, and strategies need to be put in place to ensure that MFL and marketing departments can cope with changes in demand and opportunities available to students. Collaboration between MFL departments and lifelong learning departments could maximise the opportunities for delivering language courses through local learning providers.

**Recommendation 2**

MFL departments should, with the support of their marketing departments and institutions, focus on sustaining and increasing demand over the next five years.

**Recommendation 15**

There is need for MFL departments to establish better partnerships with FE institutions and adult education organisations, as well as with the departments of lifelong learning within their respective higher education institutions.

Q11 ***How can links be further fostered between HEIs' MFL departments and their own marketing departments and between MFL departments and FEIs, adult education organisations and lifelong learning departments?***

### **C.ii. Innovation**

- 25 The report applauds MFL departments for innovative approaches to the provision and delivery of MFL and provides examples of innovations by HEIs in the form of case studies. However, it also notes that these approaches have been mainly reactive to sustain demand and improve choice and suggests that innovations could be taken forward strategically and co-operatively.

#### **Recommendation 11**

The development of *ab initio* provision along with further targeting of non-specialist provision, particularly for overseas students, should be undertaken by MFL departments as part of their medium to long term strategies for provision.

- Q12 ***How can HEIs build upon and disseminate innovative practices within their own institution or in other HEIs?***

### **C.iii. Research**

- 26 The report highlights concerns about a decline in the numbers of MFL research students in Wales.

#### **Recommendation 20**

MFL departments should undertake further exploration of the scope for collaborative research across HEIs in Wales. This process can also examine potential sources of funding, including: the Arts and Humanities Research Board [now the AHRC], private foundations, EU funding programmes and charitable trusts.

#### **Recommendation 21**

Established MFL departments should take the lead in building capacity and creating new research networks, including institutions with little or no MFL research profile.

- 27 Research capacity will be one of the issues taken into account as part of the subjects of a broader importance in a Welsh context agenda.

- Q13 ***How can HEIs in Wales build on current research capacity in MFL by creating new research networks or collaborating to tap more effectively into sources of funding?***

### **C.iv. Links with employers**

- 28 The report found that the promotion of language development would need to involve external stakeholders, including in the business sector, in order to help establish a better understanding of the skills that language graduates possess. They found few examples of strategies to establish links with employers. This is one of the most significant areas where further interaction should be encouraged, which would help employers to work internationally and students to recognise the value of language skills for the workplace.

#### **Recommendation 28**

MFL departments should combine expertise and contacts to support local businesses and industry when required.

#### **Recommendation 29**

There should also be more contacts made between MFL departments and business intermediaries, such as Business Eye, as this would be beneficial to departments and to the institutions themselves.

- Q14 ***How could links between HEIs and employer groups or businesses be encouraged?***

## **C.v. Welsh medium**

- 29 The report suggests that the provision of MFL teaching through the medium of Welsh could be at the forefront of a revised strategy to encourage the learning of MFL from school level upwards. The report suggests that existing Welsh medium providers should increase co-operation and develop joint teaching materials and accredited courses.

### **Recommendation 4**

The provision of specialist courses is to be encouraged as is the further provision of Welsh medium MFL courses. This again could form part of departmental, institutional and collaborative strategies. The Steering Group on Welsh Medium Provision in Higher Education should examine how existing expertise and skills in Welsh-medium MFL can be brought together to support such provision through networks serving both staff and students.

- Q15 ***In addition to the work being recommended for the Steering Group for Welsh Medium Provision and the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Centre, how could these actions be mainstreamed within an institution's overall strategy for MFL and how could collaboration play a part?***

## **CONSULTATION SEMINAR**

- 30 A consultation seminar will be held to discuss the report's recommendations and to further gauge the views of HEIs and others who would be key in taking forward an action plan on future developments in MFL in HE. It will take place on **Monday, 3 October 2005**. We welcome representation from anyone who is interested in this agenda. We will particularly wish to see representation from senior managers and senior representatives from MFL and other associated departments so that HEFCW can be aware of the institutional stance on some of the recommendations. Invitations will be issued to HEIs and other relevant organisations in due course.
- 31 We hope that the morning session will allow HEFCW to report on the consultation and its own developments, and allow CILT Cymru and HEW to indicate how they might facilitate collaboration between institutions and departments. The afternoon session will be available to the sector to network and to discuss possibilities for collaboration, to feed into the action plan.
- 32 In the meantime, institutions might wish to use the consultation period to consider how the MFL development fund could potentially facilitate collaborative developments in the promotion and marketing of MFL, in widening access to MFL courses and in engagement with employers. We would also encourage further deliberation on the potential for applying to HEFCW's Reconfiguration and Collaboration fund in order to take forward other actions which arise from the report.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

- 33 The Council would welcome any other comments which respondents might wish to make on the report and its recommendations.

## **RESPONSES**

- 34 Responses should be sent to Emma Raczka, Learning and Teaching Manager, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Linden Court, The Orchards, Ilex Close, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5DZ, or email: [emma.raczka@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:emma.raczka@hefcw.ac.uk) by **Friday, 14 October 2005**.