
MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEVELOPMENT FUND

6 January 2006

Ref: W06/01HE

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

Summary: This circular:
i) informs institutions of the outcomes of the consultation on *A strategic review of modern language provision in HEFCW-funded higher education institutions*, and shares ideas on good practice and future action; and
ii) invites higher education institutions to submit proposals for collaborative developments in modern foreign languages provision in higher education in Wales.

Response by: Friday, 17 February 2006

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 This circular:
 - i) informs institutions of the outcomes of the consultation on the recommendations in the report, *A strategic review of modern language provision in HEFCW-funded higher education institutions*, including sharing ideas on existing and suggested good practice which emerged through the consultation, and on future action; and
 - ii) invites higher education institutions to submit proposals for collaborative developments in modern foreign languages (MFL) provision in higher education (HE) in Wales.

BACKGROUND

- 2 Circular W05/48HE announced the publication of the report on modern foreign languages provision in HE in Wales and sought views on the report's recommendations, and on future action. The consultation included a seminar on 3 October, which gave stakeholders, including heads of MFL departments and institutional strategic planners, an opportunity to discuss how to take forward some of the report's recommendations and possible collaborative action. A summary of the consultation outcomes is at **Annex A**.

THE MFL DEVELOPMENT FUND

- 3 A sum of £100K is available in 2005/06 for institutions to progress collaborative actions. The aim of the fund is to:
 - develop the marketing of MFL in Wales and further afield, including through widening access activities;
 - formulate an organised, comprehensive approach to engaging employers; and
 - collaborate on MFL courses across departmental and institutional boundaries, including in distance learning.
- 4 The long-term goal of any collaborative initiative must be to encourage the study of modern foreign languages in HEIs in Wales, in order to improve Wales's capacity in languages, as outlined in the Assembly's strategy for modern languages in Wales, *Languages Count*.

CRITERIA FOR PROPOSALS FOR FUNDING

- 5 Institutions are invited to submit collaborative proposals or, preferably, a single, sector-wide proposal for developments. CILT Cymru, in partnership with, as appropriate, the HE Academy's Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) and In-cymru (Language Network Cymru), has announced that it wishes to play an active part in the formulation and implementation of the programme to develop MFL in Wales, in both the short and longer term.
- 6 Suggested areas for development, informed by the MFL consultation, include:
 - An integrated marketing project, addressing employers, school/careers staff and potential students. Strategies to widen access could be included in the project;
 - Collaborative ventures between access units, lifelong learning, specialist and non-specialist MFL departments in order to strengthen the appeal of MFL to students from under-represented groups. Work could include targeting school pupils through, for example, mentoring schemes or offering samples of language learning;
 - Other collaborative actions facilitated by the network of lifelong learning departments in HEIs. For example, 'ambassadorial' schemes for MFL with current undergraduate or Erasmus students, either in schools, FE institutions or the workplace;

- The promotion of the year abroad, through, for example, encouraging work placements for students during their year abroad;
 - Using distance learning as a means of widening the pool of applicants to MFL courses or facilitating co-operation in language teaching between departments, through collaboration with the Open University in Wales;
 - The development of strategies to improve the promotion of MFL to employers; and
 - Promoting language awareness, as an additional professional skill, to students in the pre-entry access process and after entry.
- 7 In any bid, one HEI must act as lead institution for funding purposes. Institutions may not use the MFL development fund for projects which could reasonably be financed from other sources and should not 'double fund' projects through this fund. Institutions are also encouraged to progress some developments through existing avenues, such as the Reaching Wider partnerships or institutional widening access or learning and teaching funding.
- 8 Proposals should not seek to tackle MFL as a subject area in isolation from wider strategic considerations. Projects should aim to increase capacity in modern languages in Wales in order to place Wales more securely in an international context. Some of the proposed actions might sit within the framework of 'subjects of a broader importance in a Welsh context'.
- 9 Any proposals will need to show the extent to which:
- they address the recommendations from the report *A review of modern language provision in HEFCW-funded HEIs* and tie in with *Languages Count*;
 - they relate to each partner institution's strategic direction;
 - they benefit each institution and language learning in HE in Wales;
 - the projects will become embedded or sustained in the long term; and
 - they are meeting the aims of the fund.
- 10 In addition, the proposals will need to identify:
- The key outcomes expected from the project(s);
 - A clear timescale within which any project(s) will operate;
 - Any other sources of funding that will feed in to the project(s), whilst providing reassurance that projects will not be double-funded;
 - The lead institution for reporting and financial purposes;
 - The role(s) each institution or partner organisation will play in the collaborative project(s); and
 - The systems in place for monitoring the use of funding and evaluating achievements.

RECONFIGURATION AND COLLABORATION FUND AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

- 11 The project period can be used by the sector to consider whether to submit an expression of interest to the HEFCW Strategic Development Fund or Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

- 12 Proposals 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 by **Friday, 17 February 2006**.
- 13 Proposals will be considered by a small advisory panel consisting of HEFCW officers and at least one Council member. Institutions will be informed of the outcomes in early March 2006 and it is anticipated that most project funding will be paid to the project leader(s) at the end of March 2006.

Modern Foreign Language (MFL) Provision in HEFCW-funded higher education institutions

Summary of consultation outcomes

General comments

There was some concern about concentrating on modern foreign languages, as the issues raised could be applied to a number of strategically important subjects. One institution did not recognise the picture painted by the report that further provision was needed and was currently concentrated in a small number of institutions. A number of respondents welcomed the report and looked forward to collaborative actions using the funding HEFCW had set aside.

It should be borne in mind that the request to undertake a review of MFL provision in HEFCW-funded HEIs was made through the Assembly's modern foreign languages strategy, *Languages Count*, which aimed to increase national ability in languages in order to place Wales more firmly in an international context.

1) *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?*

There was some concern that a strategy for MFL should be considered over other subject areas, and in the contexts of institutional autonomy, flexibility and strategic planning and subjects of a broader importance. Others welcomed a more strategic focus, which would help ensure MFL provision was Wales-wide and help combat the reduction in provision which had already happened in some institutions. This would need to take account of existing excellence and modes of delivery.

2) *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?*

Some respondents agreed that making small adjustments to the HEFCW funding model would not be favoured by institutions and there was some concern about making structural changes in MFL provision over other vulnerable subjects. However, other respondents took a differing view and argued for support for MFL modules in the form of a premium, particularly given the perceived expense of running MFL courses, or a re-think of how modules in less popular languages could be offered.

Suggestions for action in this area included: developing the marketing of MFL to young people; formulating an organised approach to engaging the business community; working through established institutions to influence public perceptions of MFL; developing and teaching some MFL courses across departmental and institutional boundaries; recommending joint research projects between HEIs, as well as with private and public sector employers, which could attract substantial funds; facilitating collaborative mutual-support networks of staff in HEIs; participating in all-Wales programmes of seminars for staff development and sharing good practice; and developing co-operation in the application of distance learning approaches in conjunction with the OU.

3) *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?*

There was support for sharing good practice and utilising existing tools in this area, and it was acknowledged that much was already being done through the Reaching Wider partnerships. The importance of HEIs tapping into students early in the education process was underlined. There was a suggestion that HE should work with schools, industry and others to promote the benefits of MFL and

that targeting pupils from lower socio-economic classifications should be part of HEIs' marketing activities.

Suggestions for action in this area included: developing local/national information networks encompassing school, FEIs and HEIs to undertake a number of developments in this area such as aspiration-raising and exchanging resources; maximising the impact of schemes already introduced in HEIs, such as the one where volunteer students mentor and coach school pupils from diverse backgrounds, from year 7 up, to encourage them to raise their sights to university entry; ensuring that MFL departments work closely with a collaborative network of lifelong learning departments in HEIs; and promoting low-level language awareness, as a professional skill, to students in the pre-entry access process and after entry.

4) *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?*

Some respondents were sceptical of the benefits in sharing or applying OU expertise to this area. Even using OU modules before undertaking or as part of a more 'traditional' undergraduate course would require some work in terms of timing and utilising resources. However, some saw MFL courses' ability to adapt to new technologies as crucial for their future growth.

Suggestions for action in this area included: exploring the collaborative delivery of 'cultural modules'; training staff to enable them to develop distance learning provision; exploring the possibility of using the OU's Lyceum so that students from other HEIs could register for an OU module and then transfer the credits to their undergraduate programme; and utilising the OU in disseminating good practice in this area amongst other HEIs in Wales.

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

It was emphasised that decisions remained with HEIs whether they wanted to collaborate, in line with strategic plans. It was suggested there was already collaboration across Wales through CILT Cymru and the HE Academy's Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, which warranted further support. There were some references to collaborating through pan-Wales and regional language networks or through the provision of lesser-taught languages such as Dutch and Russian, but there was little mention of the RCF. A collaborative proposal consisting of 10 projects in England that was funded through the HEFCE Restructuring and Collaboration Fund was put forward as an example of a large-scale collaborative proposal.

Suggestions for action in this area included: the development of pan-Wales and regional languages networks; collaboration in the provision of less common languages; and supporting and disseminating collaborative good practice undertaken by heads of MFL, CILT Cymru and LLAS.

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

On the negative side, this was not a problem unique to MFL and logistics, geography and institutional missions might make it more difficult to collaborate on the staffing side. Others were more positive, suggesting that distance learning and sharing staff might help HEIs offer a wider range of language modules, particularly in lesser-taught languages.

Suggestions for action in this area included: employing and sharing staff to take forward innovations being funded through the HEFCW MFL development fund in areas such as the teaching of lesser-studied languages and research/course development; and allowing students to select a language module as part of their undergraduate programme.

7) How could the links with FEIs and training organisations be made by HEIs?

Links had already been made to some extent by HEIs. Some respondents suggested that such links could improve local choice of languages, as well as being useful to widen access.

Suggestions for action in this area included: using a transparent credit framework which could incorporate the Languages Ladder of the European Framework for Languages; all FEIs being supplied with information on the benefits of language skills at different levels; and enhancing the impact on FEIs and training organisations by building on existing promotional activities.

8) How could institutions take forward this recommendation with careers, employer and training organisations?

Respondents wished to underline the role played by other organisations, as well as HEIs, in promoting the benefits of language learning. One respondent was not convinced that employers were unclear about the benefits of MFL *degrees*, although it was generally acknowledged that more work needed to be done on the benefits of language *skills*.

Suggestions for action in this area included: providing a forum to exchange experiences and disseminate good practice among teachers, learners and users of MFL; establishing creative links with the training sector; and carrying out further collaborative work to persuade and promote to careers, employers and training organisations the business value of language skills at all levels.

9) 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?

Most respondents agreed that the year abroad was valuable and should remain a key element of MFL courses in HE, with a minority highlighting the benefits of shorter, staggered periods overseas. Not all respondents agreed that students were deterred by it. Some suggested enhancing the financial assistance available to students during this year, such as bursaries or subsistence grants or salaried work in schools.

Suggestions for action in this area included: sharing good practice in marketing the year abroad; dealing with issues common to HEIs such as a systematic approach to work placements, including funding issues; and establishing a national (Welsh) service for the provision of work placements abroad.

10) How might MFL departments contribute to the development of institutional corporate and international development strategies?

MFL departments in HEIs appeared to have differing roles in feeding into corporate and international development strategies. Some pointed to the importance of integrating language modules with other subject areas or embedding communications skills into courses to enable graduates to operate globally.

Suggestions for action in this area included: more ties with and providing advice in developing institutional corporate and international development strategies; assisting the international office at recruitment fairs and in development of international marketing materials; and including international elements in the marketing strategies for MFL in individual HEIs and collaboratively at national level.

11) 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

There was already work going on in this area. Whilst not all HEIs believed more could be done on top of existing programmes, unless HEIs were steered by the Assembly or HEFCW to provide new

courses, others put forward more practical ideas for action. These included: developing initiatives in MFL and e-learning; placing full time students with local businesses as language ambassadors; targeting students from lower socio-economic classifications part of their wider MFL marketing strategies; and demonstrating the value of languages to potential language learners, training managers, business users.

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

There was already a range of language modules available in HEIs in Wales and innovation had already been beneficial to providers in Wales. This was one area which could benefit from the dissemination of good practice. Some suggested innovative practices which could benefit from collaboration, including looking into developing *ab initio* and non-specialist provision by drawing on OU expertise; developing new courses/business services in collaboration; and sharing course elements by video network and staff exchanges.

13) *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?*

Institutions already had links with other HEIs both in Wales and beyond. Although HEIs did not wish to push for unnatural collaborations between institutions, one saw merit in HEIs with well established research bases meeting with HEFCW and the AHRC in the context of 'subjects of a broader importance'. Another suggested it might be useful to set up a database of research interests in MFL in HEIs in Wales.

14) *How could links between HEIs and employer groups or businesses be encouraged?*

Although it was accepted that this was not the sole responsibility of HEIs and that some work was already going on in this area, a number of ways of engaging with business groups were suggested, such as: awareness-raising briefings to demonstrate the added value of linguistic and cultural awareness to any business operating outside the UK; through business/education forums; and through support from WAG and other agencies.

15) *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?*

Respondents had mixed views about the demand for Welsh medium MFL courses, bearing in mind that much MFL teaching would be done through the target language. Respondents suggested networks and distance learning as possible means of enhancing provision in this area. There could also be some potential for collaborative work in developing new courses and the associated teaching materials.