
WIDENING ACCESS

12/01/2006

Ref: W06/03HE

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales;
Principals of directly funded further education colleges

Summary: This circular informs institutions of a number of developments relating broadly to widening access.

Response by:

Further information: David Blaney
Telephone: 02920 682221
E-mail: david.blaney@hefcw.ac.uk

Celia Hunt
Telephone: 02920 682224
E-mail: celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This circular informs institutions of a number of developments relating broadly to widening access. Specifically, the circular:
 - i) Offers a response from the Council to comments received from the sector as part of the recent consultation on the costs of widening access;
 - ii) Informs the sector of the decisions taken by the Council regarding future premium funding arrangements to support widening access;
 - iii) Notes that the Council is undertaking a race equality impact assessment of widening access, prior to issuing a request for new three-year widening access strategies for 2006/07 to 2008/09, and gives notice of a request for responses.

WIDENING ACCESS FUNDING CONSULTATION

- 2 Institutions will be aware that the Funding Council's remit extends fully to effecting strategic interventions to seek to ensure that the sector meets the broad goals set by the Welsh Assembly Government. Such interventions, including the strategic targeting of core funding, are particularly important in circumstances where there is a need to steer actively to improve performance towards the meeting of *Reaching Higher* targets, especially when, as now appears to be the case with the Communities First target, a target is at risk in terms of the collective performance of the sector.
- 3 In considering specific strategic interventions, the Council is able to use a range of approaches through which to engage with the sector. A full written consultation, over an extended period, does not always represent the most effective means of securing the input of sector views to any specific consideration. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case when decisions have to be taken promptly in order to secure the desired change in sector performance as swiftly as possible.
- 4 In the case of possible adjustments to the premium payment arrangements to support widening access, the Council was keen to be able to move forwards with new arrangements in time for the 2006/07 funding round. A process of consultation through a sector-wide seminar followed by a period for the submission of additional written responses was adopted. The Council is grateful to the sector for the contribution both at the seminar, which resulted in a further model being prepared, and in subsequent submissions. All responses received in advance of the December meeting of the Council were fully considered in determining the appropriate course of action.
- 5 In noting the observations of some that the consultation method used was inappropriate, the Council considers that, on the contrary, the consultation was highly effective in generating alternative approaches for consideration and in providing institutions with ample opportunity to make their views known on a matter relating to an adjustment amounting to less than 1% of the total grant distributed annually by the Council.

FUTURE WIDENING ACCESS FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

- 6 The findings of the study by JM Consulting into the costs of widening access were shared with the sector at the consultation seminar. The report is available, with this circular, on the HEFCW website. In the context of the findings of the study, the Council has agreed that funding, initially amounting to £2.5m per annum, should be targeted to improving further widening access performance in order to:
 - i) Recognise the difference in the gap identified between funding and costs in England and Wales; and,

- ii) Widen the range of measures used to define widening access students in Wales, taking particular account of the *Reaching Higher* target relating to the recruitment of Communities First students.
- 7 The following principles, which were outlined at the consultation seminar, underpin the allocation modelling:
- i) To retain the current widening access funding method (i.e. a premium of £215 per student from low affluence areas);
 - ii) To introduce an incentive to recruit students from Communities First areas (as defined in the *Reaching Higher* target);
 - iii) To allocate some funding in relation to hard to retain students;
 - iv) To widen the base of students included in the calculation of the allocation;
 - v) To redistribute funding from the main teaching funding (up to a maximum of £2.5m);
 - vi) To make allocations based on a headcount for those undergraduates active in the academic year (i.e. studying for 10 credits or more); and,
 - vii) To model the new methods on 2003/04 HESA data and 2005/06 funding for comparison purposes.
- 8 The Council has agreed to establish a premium which will operate in addition to the existing Widening Access Premium of £215 per student. This premium, which will also be set at £215 in the first instance, will be allocated in respect of all students recruited from Communities First areas. It is estimated that this will amount to an allocation of some £1m. In addition, the balance of the £2.5m funding for this initiative will be allocated in respect of those students whom research has indicated are difficult to retain (i.e. students with non-traditional qualifications).
- 9 Allocations using 2003/04 HESA data to calculate what the 2005/06 funding would have been under this approach (which was presented as Model C in the consultation seminar), can be found at Annex A, together with the original 2005/06 widening access premium allocations, for comparison purposes.
- 10 Calculation of the allocations will be made on data which are already collected by, or available to, the Council; there will be no additional data requirements arising from these proposals.
- 11 Institutions will be expected to spend any funds targeted additionally in this initiative in support of widening access in accordance with existing practice in respect of the Widening Access Premium. Similarly, it is intended that reporting on expenditure should be made as part of reporting on Widening Access Strategies which, from 2006/07, will be undertaken via the Annual Monitoring Statement.
- 12 During the consultation process, concern was expressed by some sector representatives that it was proposed to redistribute existing teaching funding for this purpose. As our observations in paragraph 2 rehearsed, it is consistent with the Council's strategic role to make such redistributions when circumstances require. However, since the consultation, the budget settlement has been announced by the Welsh Assembly Government, and an additional £2m has been made available to the Council for distribution to the sector in financial year 2006-07. The Council has agreed that this should be used to offset all but £500k of the £2.5m associated with this initiative. The Council has also agreed that a sum amounting to 40% of this funding should be released to the sector in the current (2005/06) academic session. Accordingly, the allocations in Annex B will be released to institutions from April 2006. In addition, and as confirmed at the consultation seminar, we will use the evidence from the study to make a case to the Welsh Assembly Government for sustained additional funding to support widening access.

WIDENING ACCESS STRATEGIES 2006/07 – 2008/09

- 13 The Widening Access Strategies/Disability Provision Development Plans circular W05/33HE reported the Council's intention to delay the request for institutions to submit a new three-year widening access strategy until 2006/07. One of the reasons for this was the Council's intention to undertake a race equality impact assessment of the area of widening access to inform the guidance circular to institutions.
- 14 Officers have undertaken some analysis of statistical information in the area of widening access and would now like to obtain more qualitative information about issues of interest in this context. The Council will be writing to institutions later this month with a request for views and issues which should be considered as part of the impact assessment. We would appreciate, if time permits, the involvement of relevant groups or committees such as your Equality Opportunities Group or Committee. We will be requesting responses by the end of February, with the aim of publishing the Widening Access/Disability Provision Development Plans guidance circular before Easter 2006.
- 15 It is not our intention that the guidance will vary significantly from that published previously but that our guidance should be informed by as wide a range of information about equality issues as possible. As noted in paragraph 11 above, Widening Access reporting from 2006/07 will be through the annual monitoring statement. Therefore, the Widening Access/Disability Provision progress and expenditure report for 2005/06 will be the last time a separate report is requested.

For further information, contact David Blaney (Tel 02920 682221; E-mail david.blaney@hefcw.ac.uk) or Celia Hunt (Tel 02920 682224; E-mail celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk).

Annex A

Widening access premium funding allocations 2005/06 - notional allocations based on new funding method

Institution	Current premium allocation 2005/06 (£)	Premium allocation using new method 2005/06 (£)	Increase in premium (£)	% increase in premium
University of Glamorgan	662,415	1,266,156	603,741	91%
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	166,625	284,073	117,448	70%
University of Wales, Bangor	149,640	293,291	143,651	96%
Cardiff University	338,625	505,051	166,426	49%
University of Wales, Lampeter	112,230	254,635	142,405	127%
University of Wales Swansea	319,705	565,601	245,896	77%
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	248,755	500,424	251,669	101%
University of Wales, Newport	366,360	738,044	371,684	101%
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education	164,045	334,540	170,495	104%
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	176,515	371,058	194,543	110%
Trinity College Carmarthen	62,350	107,073	44,723	72%
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama	10,535	17,855	7,320	69%
Total	2,777,800	5,237,800	2,460,000	89%

Notes: The current premium allocation for 2005/06 shown here is as published in the 2005/06 recurrent grant circular (HEFCW circular W05/12HE). The allocations calculated using the new method are equivalent to those for Model C presented at the consultation seminar. Allocations are based on 2003/04 HESA data for HEIs. Allocations for FECs were not presented at the seminar.

Annex B

Additional widening access premium funding 2005/06

Institution	Additional allocation for 2005/06 (£)
University of Glamorgan	193,228
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	37,590
University of Wales, Bangor	45,976
Cardiff University	53,265
University of Wales, Lampeter	45,577
University of Wales Swansea	78,699
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	80,547
University of Wales, Newport	118,958
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education	54,567
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	62,264
Trinity College Carmarthen	14,314
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama	2,343
Bridgend College	366
Coleg Sir Gâr	4,083
Coleg Llandrillo	4,631
Coleg Menai	244
Neath Port Talbot College	609
Coleg Morgannwg	2,438
Swansea College	305
Total	800,000

Notes: Allocations have been made using 2003/04 HESA data for HEIs; and original 2005/06 premium allocations for FECs.