

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

Reference: W06/05HE
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Response By: 31 March 2006
Further Information: Jane Johns

**WIDENING ACCESS (WA) STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS/DISABILITY PROVISION
DEVELOPMENT PLANS 2004/05 AND 2005/06
RACE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS IN WIDENING ACCESS**

Thank you for your response to circular W05/33HE and the submission of your institution's Widening Access Strategy Implementation Plan and Disability Development Plan for 2005/06, together with reports on 2004/5 Widening Access Fund, Widening Access Premium and Disability Premium expenditure. A first tranche Widening Access Fund allocation was made to institutions in November/December 2005; the second and final payment for this period will be made in March 2006.

In April 2005 we provided a summary of the 2002/03 to 2004/05 Widening Access Implementation Plans in the circular W05/20HE. This letter provides further generic feedback on the Widening Access Implementations Plans 2005/06 in **Annex A** and Disability Development Plans 2005/6 in **Annex B**. As circular W05/20HE above also noted, progress with the 2005/06 widening access and disability implementation plans will take the same format as in previous years. However, from 2006/07 reports will form part of the July 2007 Annual Monitoring Statement.

Guidance for the development of new Widening Access Strategies and Disability Plans will be published in April 2006. To inform the new strategies' development, circular W05/33HE and circular W06/03HE noted the Council's intention to undertake a race equality impact assessment. Further information on the impact assessment is attached as **Annex C**. The response date for your views and issues, which will be considered as part of the impact assessment, is **31 March 2006**. Should time permit, we would be grateful for the involvement of your Equal Opportunities Group or Committee or any other interested parties. We would welcome your views to contribute to the assessment. It is not intended that the new Widening Access/Disability Plan guidance will vary significantly from that published previously, but that the guidance should be informed by as wide a range of equality information as possible.

For further information please contact Jane Johns on telephone number: (01570) 424892 or email: Jane.Johns@hefcw.ac.uk.



PHILIP GUMMETT

WIDENING ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION PLANS 2004/05 AND 2005/06 GENERIC FEEDBACK

Assembly Priorities, Institutional Strategies and Widening Access

1. HEFCW welcomed the way that the majority of widening access implementation plans cross-referenced their widening access developments to institutional plans and other key strategic documents such as race equality plans.
2. Some widening access plans noted actual and planned progress against both the UK performance indicators and *Reaching Higher* targets. However, some plans were less focused on achievement and planning against the specific Assembly's *Reaching Higher* targets. We acknowledged that the *Reaching Higher* targets were confirmed after the 2002/3 to 2005/6 widening access strategy cycle began. Therefore, we welcomed the progress made by some institutions, during this four year reporting period, to align specifically institutional widening access provision with the *Reaching Higher* sector-wide targets for achievement by 2010.

Reporting Widening Access Achievement

3. Some institutions set themselves and reported against specific targets eg number of students enrolled per activity, number of activities, number of contact hours. Other plans reported progress more qualitatively. Without quantitative target setting, it was difficult for some institutions to clearly demonstrate progress. Good reporting practice included tabulated data on widening access targets, progress against the targets and explanations where targets were not met.
4. From 2006/07 we will require institutions to report using the Annual Monitoring Statement (AMS) whereby specific targets are agreed at the start of a strategy and against which progress is reported annually.

Funding

5. Some plans reported expenditure in detail, differentiating between Widening Access Fund and Widening Access Premium expenditure; this was helpful in the analysis of expenditure. Some plans noted the full costs of widening access delivery and the HEFCW contribution to the total cost. Other plans noted external funding obtained to support their widening access provision, thus providing a more comprehensive profile of activities.

Collaboration

6. A number of institutions provided detailed information of partnership working with external organisations demonstrating the breadth of work with community and other organisations. One plan highlighted its intention to link with existing community strategies and action plans. This collaboration will avoid the duplication of provision and the overburdening of Assembly prioritised groups by many providers. Membership of CCETs and 14-19 Learning Networks were also noted in some plans. Such information was helpful in demonstrating the range of HEIs' work in the community with voluntary and other groups.
7. Most plans noted the institution's involvement with its *Reaching Wider* regional partnership. However, reporting did not always clarify whether an activity was funded by *Reaching Wider*, institutional widening access funding or both funding sources; further clarification in future reporting by some institutions would be helpful.

8. We particularly welcomed plans that clearly articulated the relationship between Reaching Wider and institutional widening access activities. One clear articulation of funding stream usage was where an institution used widening access funding with a particular school up to an agreed age, before Reaching Wider funded activities developed further links with older age groups. Synergy of this kind between the two funding streams demonstrated effective use of limited funding and collaboration.
9. We encourage institutions to adopt an increasingly co-ordinated approach to widening access and to build coherence and complementarity between institutional strategies and Reaching Wider activity. This was a focus of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning's 2005-06 remit letter to HEFCW: 'to ensure a clear alignment between institutional widening access strategies and the partnerships' strategies to bring added value.'

Management, Planning, Implementation and Monitoring

10. Most institutions outlined their planning and reporting mechanisms within a context of wider institutional planning. Several plans also highlighted widening access internal and external evaluation processes including student tracking and monitoring progression from outreach provision through to campus-based provision. Retention strategies were an area where several institutions planned to monitor progress. One institution specifically noted that a major planning challenge for 2005/06 was the effective integration and delivery of widening access provision with other initiatives, including Reaching Wider. However, without robust target setting it would be difficult for institutions to demonstrate their success.

Equality and Diversity

11. Some institutions noted the development and monitoring of race and other specific diversity plans. One institution stated that its equal opportunities checklist informs all decisions in relation to the curriculum, student support and childcare. However, several institutions did not appear to be as advanced in developing equality and diversity plans and did not report specifically on progress. We would, therefore welcome further reference to this work in the 2005/06 July progress reports.

Good Practice in Widening Access Provision

12. A number of examples of good practice that emerged from this year's plans included:
 - working with pupils studying an alternative curriculum and with young offenders to enable them to gain qualifications;
 - promoting widening access work by achieving inclusion in a UK-wide report on good practice in widening access;
 - developing IT provision to include delivery through sign language;
 - providing SENDA and race equality training to all new staff appointments;
 - enhancing employability by developing undergraduate Welsh language skills options to support teaching in vocational subject areas;
 - developing on-line study skills advice materials to support retention;
 - collaborating with regional HEI partners to develop learning curricula;
 - developing an 'in-reach' strategy to create and maintain a culture of widening access throughout the institution.
 - Providing research, seminars and conferences to disseminate widening access good practice both within organisations and more widely.

DISABILITY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS 2004/05 AND 2005/06 GENERIC FEEDBACK

Institutional Strategies, Legislation and Disability Planning

1. All higher education institutions provided information on progress against their 2004/05 disability provision development plan (DPDP) objectives and implementation plans for 2005/06.
2. Institutions are increasingly aware of the need to ensure that the DPDP is consistent with their overall goals and strategies and continue to show how the strategies are monitored, evaluated and inform future planning. HEIs increasingly consider new ways of including staff and students in the institutional planning process and involving senior management in disability matters, through extending awareness and satisfaction surveys and improving the use of working groups.
3. We are pleased that a number of the plans have reportedly been informed by appropriate legislation. Whilst most institutions have referred to the institution-wide measures that will lead them produce a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006 and how they will involve disabled people in the process, this approach has not been consistent across the sector, in spite of references in the guidance on strategies produced by HEFCW. We hope that all institutions are aware of the Disability Equality Duty for public authorities and will concentrate increasingly on positive action and improved outcomes for disabled people within this legislative framework.

Targets, Admissions and Disability Plans

4. HEFCW acknowledges the sector's progress against the performance indicator benchmark which indicates that, overall, Wales is outperforming the rest of the UK in the recruitment of full-time undergraduate and first degree students in receipt of a Disabled Students' Allowance.
5. A small number of institutions included specific targets in their plans, such as an analysis of the completion rates and examination grades of disabled students compared with overall retention and achievement, helping them to produce strategies to attract more disabled students. However, it was difficult to analyse admissions data as institutions often found that disability was under-recorded on UCAS returns, particularly in the area of mental health. Some developed staff training programmes based on institutional statistics and feedback. Others continued to plan against a backdrop of institutional audits, the QAA Code of Practice for Students with Disabilities, disability legislation and feedback from students and staff through questionnaires and forums. One institution reported that it is exploring how best to investigate the reasons that prospective applicants, including disabled prospective students, might have for not applying to the institution in the first place. Another underlined the importance of ensuring that the quality of provision for disabled students was assured.

Funding

6. Institutions have ensured either that disability premium funding is ring-fenced, or that premium funding expenditure can be identified within the larger disability funding pot. Most institutions continue to build upon achievements already financed through disability premium and other funding. A considerable percentage of funding continues to be used for appointments to help progress institutional strategies and provide student support. A

few institutions noted the importance of ensuring that some funding was ring-fenced to support non-DSA home and international students.

7. Institutions sometimes remark that providing for disabled students can involve considerable financial and time commitments. However, institutions increasingly demonstrate that provision for disabled students can be mainstreamed within all aspects of an institution's work, assisted by departments and institutions working together and using HEFCW funding innovatively.

Good Practice in Disability Planning

8. Some themes and examples of good practice that emerged from institutions' DPDPs this year include:
 - addressing transition, pre-HE and admissions issues;
 - balancing 'anticipatory' with 'reactive' support;
 - encouraging disabled students to disclose particular needs within an inclusive and confidence-boosting environment;
 - improving the assessment of students for DSA;
 - maintaining or increasing the number of DSA-recorded students in accordance with the institutional benchmark, including through improved internal monitoring and recording;
 - employing additional staff to manage increases in disabled student numbers;
 - supporting disabled international students;
 - improving awareness of mental health issues;
 - training BSL interpreters and support workers, and improving other auxiliary aids and services;
 - continuing with estates developments to ensure safety and accessibility;
 - improving website accessibility and enhancing accessible information policies;
 - improving emergency egress;
 - reviewing key documents and training needs in preparation for the new legislative climate;
 - establishing working groups, which involve staff, students and external stakeholders, to prepare institutional Disability Equality Schemes;
 - improving linkages with local groups and initiatives; and
 - mainstreaming provision, including through increasing staff development opportunities.

WIDENING ACCESS RACE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Background

Within the arrangements of its Race Equality Scheme, HEFCW is undertaking a race equality impact assessment in the widening access policy area. The purpose of the impact assessment within widening access is to explore issues related to increasing the number of under-represented students from black and other ethnic minority communities entering higher education in Wales, including the entry barriers, retention, academic achievement and graduate employment.

The Widening Access Race Impact Assessment Process

We have undertaken a quantitative analysis of monitoring information and would now like to collect more qualitative information about the access and retention issues facing black and other ethnic minority groups in higher education in Wales. We are seeking the views and expertise of interested groups in the sector and elsewhere about widening access and possible future action.

Although the focus of the assessment is on race, we are also interested to hear views about other matters related to access by under-represented groups to higher education, where these relate to equality, particularly regarding gender issues and those related to disability.

The outcomes of the assessment will inform our guidance to higher education institutions in Wales with regard to their new strategies for widening access covering the period 2006/07 to 2008/09. Whilst we would not expect to alter our guidance significantly from that published previously (circular W02/40HE), we wish to ensure that that the guidance is informed by as wide a range of equality information as possible.

It should be noted that the feedback HEFCW receives from this consultation process will inform policies and processes related to the funding of widening access activities in universities and colleges in Wales and will not impact specifically on individual student funding.

Indicative Issues for Consideration

We would welcome responses on the following questions, but information on other issues which are pertinent to policy regarding widening access would also be welcome:

- Are there barriers preventing access by certain ethnic minority groups to higher education, if so what are they?;
- Is there a subject bias in ethnic minority applications, recruitment and retention, if so what might account these trends?;
- To what extent is higher education provision accessed differentially by different racial groups and what might be the reasons for this?;
- Within cultural groups are there issues regarding the gender distribution of students accessing HE or other issues of multiple identities which should be taken account of?;
- Are there issues which need to be addressed concerning access to higher education by those from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant communities?;
- Are there Welsh examples of good practice in working with black and other ethnic minority communities which should be widely shared?;
- Are there other issues which need to be addressed in considering widening access to black and other ethnic minority groups?;

- Do you have any other comments which could contribute to this assessment?;

We will publish the outcome of this assessment on our website.

Date for Responses

Responses should be sent, 31 March 2006, to Celia Hunt, Head of Learning and Teaching, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Linden Court, the Orchards, Ilex Close, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5DZ or celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk