

## HEFCW's Draft Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education 2010/11 to 2012/13

### Introduction

1. HEFCW's *Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* sets out our commitment to delivering the Welsh Assembly Government's widening access expectations in *For Our Future: the Twenty-first Century Strategy and Plan for Higher Education*.
2. The HEFCW *Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* (from now on referred to as our *Approach*) sits beneath the HEFCW Corporate Strategy<sup>1</sup>. It covers the same period, 2010 -11 to 2012-13, and it provides a fuller picture of our strategic intentions. Its purpose is to promote a clear understanding of widening access policy and practice in Wales, as we recognise inconsistencies in meaning and messages are unhelpful for the sector, our partners and for learners<sup>2</sup>. Our intentions in setting out our *Approach* are to be: challenging in our aspirations; clear on our agenda for action; realistic in managing expectations, and transparent in providing a mechanism for measuring progress and demonstrating success.
3. We recognise that our *Approach* has been developed before the Comprehensive Spending Review outcomes and their implications for Higher Education in Wales are known. In addition, we are mindful of that there will be policy implications arising from the introduction of the National Bursary Framework and the response to the Browne Review of fees<sup>3</sup>. Clearly, we will need to take account of the impact of these developments in finalising and implementing our *Approach*.
4. We recognise that higher education institutions' responses to government policy, including strategic actions to deliver widening access, are influenced by diverse factors, including missions, geography and partnerships. In addition, economic climate and regional configurations in this period will drive significant funding and structural changes which will impact on widening access planning and delivery. Within this context, our *Approach* confirms how we will support the higher education sector and its partners to build on and maximise the widening access contribution to social justice and promoting a buoyant economy: the key *For Our Future* priorities. Our aim is to work with higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that the sector's total widening access contribution delivers demonstrable benefits to learners, communities, employers and citizens and that it supports our business case for the use of public funding.
5. This *Approach* has been informed by HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee (SETQC), SETQC's Widening Access Task and Finish

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<sup>1</sup> HEFCW's *Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13* can be found at:  
[http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate\\_documents/corporate\\_strategy.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_strategy.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> A glossary of terms is provided at **Appendix A**.

<sup>3</sup> *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education (Oct 2010)*[www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report](http://www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report)

Group and discussions with a range of individuals and organisations<sup>4</sup>. In addition, it has been subject to a full equalities impact assessment.

### HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13

6. Our *Approach* should be understood within the context of HEFCW's Corporate Strategy<sup>5</sup>. Our Corporate Strategy establishes widening access as one of five strategic themes which will contribute to delivering the *For Our Future* priorities of social justice and supporting a buoyant economy as shown in the diagram in **Appendix C**.
7. We recognise that the five strategic themes are interdependent and cannot operate in isolation. Therefore, our widening access policies and practice will make a significant contribution to several of the Corporate Strategy themes including:
  - **The Student Experience**, including the student voice, part-time and flexible learning, workbased learning and Welsh medium study;
  - **Skills** and employability as key outcomes, equipping more people in Wales, including in the Heads of the Valleys, with new and/or higher level skills and offering improved learning opportunities; and
  - **Research** performance to underpin cultural and social renewal.
8. To focus our widening access intentions, our Corporate Strategy states that the purpose of widening access in Wales is to **'ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education'**.
9. **Appendix D** sets out our Corporate Strategy's high-level approach to widening access policy development which provides the foundations for our *Approach*.

### Widening Access Measures of Success

10. In setting out our strategic approach, the Corporate Strategy also establishes how we will measure success. The primary target for widening access continues a focus on Communities First (CF) areas. It measures improved access and progression for people of *all ages* in locations where such opportunities are low, including the Heads of the Valleys, and it is a proxy measure of social class. We recognise that the new Communities First target is challenging as it seeks:

**A 10% rise in the proportion of all Welsh domiciled students studying higher education courses at higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales who are domiciled in the Welsh Communities First Areas from 15.6% in 2008/09 to 17.2% in 2012/13.**

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<sup>4</sup> **Appendix B** contains the Task and Finish Group's membership and initial stakeholder dialogues.

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate\\_documents/corporate\\_documents.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_documents.aspx)

11. The second measure focuses on the number of students successfully completing their learning objectives, thus recognising the importance of ensuring widening access learners' success in and beyond higher education. It seeks:

**A 2.7% rise in the module completion rate for undergraduate enrolments in Welsh higher education institutions from 87.6% in 2008/09 to 90% in 2012/13.**

12. **Appendix E** provides additional information about the above measures.
13. In addition to these measures, we will also continue to monitor the sector's performance against other widening access indicators, using pre-existing data and taking account of other relevant UK performance indicators where appropriate. Indicators will include the recruitment and retention of disabled students, minority ethnic students, care leavers, and students' age, gender and socio-economic profiles. Wales has performed well in most of these indicators, therefore, our approach to monitoring will be risk-based, with more detailed monitoring and further action where concerns arise.

## **HEFCW's Role**

14. Our role in relation to widening access to higher education is to:
  - i. work with the **Welsh Assembly Government and the higher education sector** to ensure that widening access developments respond to, and align with, related Assembly Government policies and priorities and the aims and objectives of other education providers, as appropriate;
  - ii. **provide strategic direction and support** to implement *For our Future* widening access priorities and deliver our Corporate Strategy objectives;
  - iii. work with **Further Education Institutions, Careers Wales** and other education providers to ensure a collaborative, strategic approach to widening access across Wales;
  - iv. inform policy developments through **strategic links** with relevant national and international agencies;
  - v. ensure that our policies are **evidence-based**;
  - vi. develop, implement and review a range of **mechanisms** to achieve our strategic objectives;
  - vii. support **institutional widening access** developments through dedicated funding streams and guidance;
  - viii. support the **Reaching Wider initiative** to ensure that it adds value to our priorities and retains and builds on its multi-agency and innovative partnership approaches;

- ix. support the implementation of the **Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol** which will work with, and through, higher education institutions in Wales to deliver increased and sustainable Welsh medium learning and teaching opportunities at all levels and contribute to a professional, well-trained, bilingual workforce;
- x. ensure that **equality of opportunity** is a fundamental principle in developing and implementing widening access policies and practice;
- xi. **promote and disseminate** current and effective widening access practices and to mainstream the lessons learnt across Wales, the UK and internationally.

### **HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education**

- 15. This *Approach* contributes to the delivery of our Corporate Strategy widening access objectives, sets our agenda for action and provides a mechanism for monitoring progress.

### **Definition and Aim of Widening Access**

- 16. 'Widening access to and through higher education' is the term we will use to define our strategic intentions in this policy area and encompass our strategic objectives.
- 17. The aim of widening access is to ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education to enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees.
- 18. We are committed to evaluating and refining our definition of widening access to contribute to advancing equality and diversity agendas. In addition to meeting our statutory responsibilities, our intention is to drive cultural change and proactive approaches to ensure that equity and diversity issues are fully integrated into our own and the sector's policies and practices and meet Welsh Assembly Government priorities.

### **Summary of Widening Access Strategic Objectives**

- 19. To achieve our aim we will:
  - i. prioritise recruitment from Communities First areas;
  - ii. improve access for groups traditionally under-represented in higher education;
  - iii. prioritise student learning success and retention;
  - iv. support fair access to the professions, high level skills and the priority sectors;
  - v. encourage flexible learning opportunities, including part-time;
  - vi. secure clear articulation and progression pathways into higher education;

- vii. maximise the potential for collaborative, cross-sectoral, multi-agency approaches;
  - viii. deploy resources to deliver our widening access objectives;
  - ix. apply a regional framework to target widening access more effectively;
  - x. improve the evidence base to support widening access and impact assessment.
20. Our priorities within these strategic objectives are set out below, together with our initial actions. Separate circulars will provide information on implementation.

## Strategic Objectives and Initial Actions

### To prioritise recruitment from Communities First areas in Wales

21. A unique feature of our widening access policy in Wales is the prioritising of recruitment to, and success in, higher education by **people of all ages** from Communities First areas. HEFCW, as an Assembly Government Sponsored Body, is expected to engage with relevant Communities First Partnerships and Plans and we will continue our commitment to contribute effectively to this policy priority. The Wales Audit Office report, *Communities First (2009)*<sup>6</sup> identifies two complementary strands as fundamental to the effective regeneration of these communities: local partnership working; and programme 'bending', or alignment, to direct resources from appropriate public programmes and organisations towards Communities First areas. We recognise the potential for widening access objectives to contribute to tackling deprivation and improving the prospects for people in these disadvantaged communities.

We will:

- i. work with the Assembly Government, further and higher education institutions and community organisations to contribute to reducing the gap in education and training outcomes between Communities First areas and other parts of Wales, including in the Heads of the Valleys;
- ii. contribute to meeting the Assembly Government's education and training strategic objectives as set out in its *Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales*;
- iii. measure the sector's commitment to improving access and progression for people in locations where such opportunities are low through a fundable target for engaging and retaining Communities First learners, as defined in our Corporate Strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> *Communities First* Wales Audit Office, 9 July 2009. See: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)

## To improve access for groups traditionally under-represented in higher education

22. We will work with the Assembly Government to contribute to strategies aimed at supporting under-represented groups as a diverse student population is a driver in widening access policy developments<sup>7</sup>. *For Our Future* (paragraph 23) recognises that Wales performs well, compared with other parts of the UK, in attracting students from under-represented backgrounds, including those from low participation neighbourhoods, state schools, and those with disabilities<sup>8</sup>. While this positive position provides a firm basis for developments, the dynamic nature of the HE environment, including increased pressure on HE places and the potential displacement of widening access applicants, means that we cannot be complacent.
23. Our Equality Scheme (2008-2010) confirms our commitment and statutory responsibilities regarding the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act, the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act and the 2006 Equality Act (recently superseded by the 2010 Equality Act)<sup>9</sup>. However, our strategic intentions extend beyond compliance. To further inform our understanding of the nature of, and trends in, under-representation, we will assess a range of datasets to evidence and develop sector and institutional performance. In addition, we will support widening access strategies and interventions which are informed by effective management data<sup>10</sup>. We will encourage institutions to monitor and take action to ameliorate differences in selection, attainment or retention patterns, to develop appropriate student support mechanisms, and to disseminate effective practice.
24. In this context, we also recognise the role family and intergenerational learning can play in creating a learning culture in homes and communities, contributing to reducing child poverty in Wales and providing parents with skills to access higher level learning and employment. We recognise the sector's commitment to raising the educational aspirations and supporting the lifechances of children in care and care leavers, with all Welsh HEIs having achieved the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark. We will work with the Trust and the sector to encourage the further development of support for children in care and care leavers and to disseminate effective practice. We will encourage the sector to take a multi-agency approach to developing further such innovative approaches which improve the learning choices and chances of families, communities and carers.

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<sup>7</sup> Including the *Refugee and Inclusion Strategy*:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/communitycohesion/publications/refugeeinclusion/?lang=en> and the *Assembly Government Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales developments*

<sup>8</sup> Our equalities monitoring data (2006/07 to 2008/09) confirms that, amongst other indicators, at Welsh HEIs: the number of students aged 20-29 has increased; the number of students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance has risen by 13.6%; and the proportion of UK-domiciled ethnic minority students at Welsh HEIs is greater than the proportion of ethnic minority students in the UK student weighted census population. Wales also has a higher proportion of part time higher education than the rest of the UK.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/about\\_us/equality\\_and\\_diversity\\_in\\_hefcw/equality\\_diversity\\_reports.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/about_us/equality_and_diversity_in_hefcw/equality_diversity_reports.aspx)

<sup>10</sup> See also priorities under improving the evidence base to support widening access and impact assessment.

We will:

- iv. align widening access policy developments with Assembly Government strategies which support groups under-represented in higher education;
- v. fund institutional widening access and Reaching Wider strategies that are underpinned by robust data;
- vi. assess the sector's performance against a range of widening access indicators to demonstrate progress and inform policy development;

### To prioritise student learning, retention and success

25. In prioritising student success and retention in our widening access *Approach* we acknowledge that a multiplicity of factors influence completion rates: widening access characteristics amongst them. We are aware that a higher number of Communities First students do not continue beyond their first year of study than other groups in the rest of the UK<sup>11</sup>. However, correlation between these factors is not inevitable and we are confident that more can be done to improve learning outcomes<sup>12</sup>. We recognise that, in the current economic climate, it is plausible that continuation rates may improve because employment opportunities are scarcer. We will support the sector to actively improve module completion rates and to improve performance in relation to the UK non-continuation indicators.
26. Our Corporate Strategy sets out a fundable target for learner completion, the key features of which are outlined in **Appendix E: Widening Access Measures of Success**. Furthermore, we will work with the Higher Education Academy to provide leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice to enhance student learning, retention and success and we will work with the sector to develop, embed and promote effective practice in retention and learning success.
27. We recognise the importance of the National Student Survey in enabling students to express their views on their higher education experiences and we will continue to contribute to this work.

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<sup>11</sup> Communities First non-continuation rate following first year of entry: Welsh domiciled full-time first year degree entrants 16.2% (UK rate 8.6%); young full time first year degree entrants 13.6% (UK rate 7.2%); mature full-time first year degree entrants 20.1% (UK rate 14.0%). (Source: HESA 2008/09)

<sup>12</sup> An international comparative study of ten developed world countries found that students from lower socio-economic groups were accessing higher education at lower rates than peers from more advantaged groups, these groups did not necessarily have lower rates of retention and success (Thomas and Quinn, 2003).

We will:

- viii. measure sector progress against a fundable target for module completion as included in our Corporate Strategy;
- ix. monitor annually HE non-completion rates, with particular emphasis on under-represented groups;
- x. monitor annually the outcomes of the National Student Survey to respond to students' experiences, identify areas of concern and promote effective practice in student engagement;
- xi. identify and share effective practice on retention;
- xii. work with the Higher Education Academy to provide leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice to enhance the student learning experience.

### To support fair access to the professions, higher level skills and the priority sectors

28. *Unleashing Aspirations* (2009) identified a number of barriers in relation to 'fair access to the professions'<sup>13</sup>. In Wales we have interpreted issues of fair access more broadly to include access to the professions, to higher level skills and the priority sectors<sup>14</sup>. Fair access requires that learning and employment opportunities are open to as wide a pool of talent as possible. We recognise that social mobility and the opportunity to fulfil one's potential are key aspects of social justice and economic prosperity. Working with the sector we will contribute to the *For Our Future* vision of higher education:

*equipping individuals, whatever their background, with the knowledge skills and attributes to achieve maximum intellectual and personal fulfilment. (paragraph 1.)*

29. Our Corporate Strategy (p.15) outlines our intentions to increase skills levels and meet the higher level skills needs of business. Our *Approach* contributes to this agenda by: supporting more locally accessible higher education; providing pathways into part-time and workbased opportunities; upskilling individuals to contribute to the digital economy; promoting routes into science, technology, engineering and maths/medicine-related professions and seeking to increase more flexible, higher-level vocational pathways<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> *Skills that Work for Wales* identifies sectors considered strategically important for the sustainable growth of the Welsh economy. See <http://www.learningobservatory.com/uploads/publications/1723.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See HEFCW strategy on enhanced learning and teaching through technology: [www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/circulars](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/circulars)

30. We recognise that Foundation Degrees are an important mechanism for delivering improved access to, and new opportunities in, higher education and employment. We anticipate that regional developments will include plans to pilot and expand routes to and from Foundation Degrees and we will work with the sector to contribute fully to economic upskilling and regeneration. We will support widening access developments that: take account of regional and national skills priorities; focus on economic upskilling and regeneration; and collaborate with businesses, Careers Wales and Learning Coach developments to ensure that learner choices are underpinned by high-quality information, advice and guidance.
31. We recognise and contribute to the work of the UK Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme to develop fair, and professional standards in, admissions practice, and to inform our policy developments and the practices of the sector and other stakeholders. Working with UCAS, we will continue to contribute to national admissions policy developments and consultations, particularly as they impact on Wales and Welsh language issues.

We will:

- xii. identify and disseminate effective international, national and Welsh practice in improving access to the professions and higher skills;
- xiii. support the sector to collaboratively explore and pilot new flexible programmes which enable progression to Foundation Degree and beyond;
- xiv. publish our Foundation Degree Policy and fund the development, promotion and delivery of new Foundation Degree provision, firmly embedded in regional strategies;
- xv. develop closer working arrangements with Careers Wales to inform learner choice and promote Foundation Degree opportunities.

To encourage flexible learning opportunities, including part-time routes to and through higher education

32. As more people with diverse backgrounds participate in higher education, the concept and nature of traditional higher education is changing and we will encourage the sector to respond to new patterns of demand and new forms of supply.
33. We recognise the need to respond to knowledge and higher level skills gaps at national and individual levels arising from: re-skilling and skills requirements, an aging demographic, changing patterns of paid and unpaid activity; and the demands of widening access and equality and diversity. *The Skills that Work for Wales Strategy and Action Plan (2008)*<sup>16</sup> recognises that without retraining, older workers' skills may become obsolete, undermining opportunities for personal development and productivity. We recognise that lifelong learning opportunities, across the whole life course, will become increasingly important

<sup>16</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/081217stfwstrategyandactionen.pdf>

in maintaining and updating skills and in providing wider benefits of learning as our workforce ages<sup>17</sup>. We acknowledge that there are widening access issues for post-graduate and international students but, given current financial constraints, we consider that, primarily, our resources should be targeted at pre-entry and undergraduate groups, as set out in our widening access definition above.

34. We will encourage the sector to extend and promote the range of learning opportunities to remove real and perceived learning barriers and enable more people to develop personal, transferrable, vocational and entrepreneurial skills. We will support demand-led flexible learning opportunities in regions and communities. To achieve this, opportunities must be relevant, tailor-made and available at times and locations that fit around work and lifestyle commitments. We will publish further information outlining how we will support the sector to recognise prior experiential learning. We will align our widening access developments with: existing strategies to enhance learning and teaching through technology;<sup>18</sup> Welsh medium and language developments through the **Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol**; and our ongoing commitment to maintain and strengthen support for part-time learners. We endorse the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and the Learner Record Service (formerly Managing Information Across Partnerships) developments which offer greater flexibility and increased portability when moving between learning providers and employers.

We will:

- xvi. review part-time funding mechanisms to ensure they remain fit for purpose and support our widening access strategic objectives;
- xvii. analyse and report progress on part-time learning and teaching developments;
- xviii. publish guidance and fund regional strategies, widening access, and learning and teaching strategies that: provide flexible learning opportunities; recognise and accredit prior experiential learning; and support progression to and from higher level learning and skills, including Foundation Degrees.

#### To secure clear articulation and progression pathways into higher education

35. We will work with the Assembly Government to align widening access developments with post-16, skills and adult and community learning policies and priorities to ensure a coherent approach to progression pathway planning and implementation.
36. We are committed to widening access to all higher education institutions in Wales and the UK for all students, regardless of their background. However, many first generation, widening access HE applicants are unwilling or unable to

<sup>17</sup> *Learning Through Life: The Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning* highlights the contribution that diverse learning opportunities can make to 'control over individual and group destinies, health and wellbeing, cultural identity and democratic tolerance. *Learning Through Life Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (NIACE, 2009, p.1)*

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.HEFCW.ac.uk/publications/circulars> Circular reference number:W07/24HE

move away from home or work to study, therefore, their choices are limited by the range and accessibility of local provision. One outcome of the regional planning and delivery framework will be that '*clearer progression pathways to higher education are in place from school, community, workplace and further education*' (*For Our Future*, paragraph 42). We recognise the need for the HE sector to work collaboratively with other education and training providers, including employers, Careers Wales and Learning Coaches to further develop and promote regional learning opportunities and make the best use of resources. We have already signalled that higher education providers' regional strategies should increase subject availability, improve geographical access, and demonstrate a higher degree of responsiveness to local learner and employer needs<sup>19</sup>.

37. We will support the sector to increase its recognition of prior learning (RPL) to facilitate shorter, more timely higher education experiences, in line with *For Our Future* expectations. RPL will facilitate increased, flexible participation in higher education and increased accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) will facilitate workforce development and enable the higher education community to play a more central, innovative and transformative role in supporting business development in the regional and national economy.

We will:

- xix. support regional strategies that include coordinated widening access opportunities which contribute to clear, new and improved progression pathways developments;
- xx. promote the use of the Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFW), RLP and the Learner Record System to recognise learners' achievements and support flexible study pathways;
- xxi. publish our position on funding APEL and good practice guidelines for institutions.

#### To maximise the potential for collaborative, cross-sectoral, multi-agency approaches

38. The Assembly Government, set out, in *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales* (2008), its intentions to improve learning opportunities and *Transformation – Y Siwrnai* (2009) outlines how the post-16 phase of this policy should be implemented<sup>20</sup>. The challenge this strategic framework sets includes: transforming the learning network to increase learner choice; securing the best delivery model to plan provision collectively; utilising funding more effectively; increasing the engagement of disadvantaged groups; reducing duplication of provision, and improving learning opportunities for all post-16 learners. We will ensure that our widening access policy developments align with, and contribute fully to, this strategic framework.

<sup>19</sup> See circulars see circulars W10/16HE and W10/06HE

<sup>20</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/100301transformationpolicyen.pdf>  
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125transformationen.pdf>

39. We recognise the progress that widening access has made in developing inclusive, cross-sectoral policies and practices, including through the Reaching Wider Partnerships. Higher education widening access interests are normally well-represented on provider networks and we have substantial evidence of the sector's effectiveness in forming flexible partnership configurations to attract European and other external funding to support innovative practices or action research.

We will:

- xxii. support widening access and Reaching Wider strategies which demonstrate genuine partnership working and add value to learning and teaching;
- xxiii. broker more multi-agency strategic dialogue and promote more effective cross-sectoral working;
- xxiv. coordinate cross-sectoral events to promote widening access policy developments and champion effective practice.

#### To deploy resources to deliver our widening access objectives<sup>21</sup>

40. We recognise that increased costs are incurred in supporting some under-represented groups. We contribute to meeting the costs of recruiting and supporting people from widening access and diversity backgrounds through recurrent funding. Our funding mechanisms support the delivery of our strategic priorities and reward effective progress towards delivering *For our Future* objectives. We recognise the need to ensure these mechanisms remain fit for purpose and are effective drivers of change.

We will:

- xxv. focus widening access funding strategically to reward effective progress towards delivering *For our Future and Corporate Strategy* objectives;
- xxvi. review and monitor widening access funding arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose;
- xxvii. examine the extent to which fee plans are aligned and contribute to broader institutional widening access policies and practices;
- xxviii. assess the extent to which there is equity between part-time and full-time student support and fee policies;

#### To apply a regional framework to target widening access more effectively

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<sup>21</sup> An appendix will be included in the final document to further explain our funding mechanisms in the light of the Comprehensive Spending review outcomes for Wales and our grant settlements.

41. The requirement for a regional dimension to planning and delivery is set out in our Corporate Strategy (p.9). These new structures will enable the sector to increase its contribution to tackling disparity in access and opportunity across Wales focussing at regional level. We intend to support more regional delivery while encouraging learner progression to all higher education provision, regardless of regional boundaries. Regional working will further align supply and demand by: driving increased strategic collaboration between HE and FE and other partners; avoiding local competition and wasteful duplication; encouraging the development of regional progression pathways and articulation agreements; facilitating closer employer engagement; and responding more effectively to communities and learners. In this context, multi-agency, cross-sectoral working will be fundamental to increasing the diversity of the student population.
42. The regional strategies will want to examine the role of both institutional widening access and Reaching Wider Partnership provision, to ensure they align with, and contribute fully to, broader regional developments. These include: the range and nature of compact agreements, HE in FE provision, genuine partnership with 14-19 learning networks and Children and Young People's partnerships and contributions to Adult Community Learning partnerships. We do not expect this coordinating function to be overly bureaucratic or burdensome, given the anticipated cost-benefits outlined above.
43. We recognise that the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) developments have the potential to inform access practices across Wales. Working with the UHOVI programme, we will identify and disseminate effective practice, encouraging its adaptation to rural and urban settings across Wales.

We will:

- xxix. support strategies which articulate clearly the regional role of widening access, including the Reaching Wider Partnerships;
- xxx. monitor regional strategies to ensure that they contribute to increasing learner progression routes to and through higher education;
- xxxi. identify and disseminate effective practice from the UHOVI programme and encourage its adaption to rural and urban settings across Wales.

#### To improve the evidence base to support widening access and impact assessment

44. We commissioned evaluations of widening access work in Wales (Arad, 2007, and the Higher Education Academy, 2009),<sup>22</sup> and we will undertake further evaluations, as appropriate, to inform further policy development and demonstrate success. The evaluation recommendations proposed that more should be done to improve institutions' widening access evidence base and to

<sup>22</sup> See: [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2007/w0709he%20circ.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2007/w0709he%20circ.pdf) and <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/wales/ourwork/wideningaccess>

inform strategic and operational developments. Therefore, a priority in this strategy period is for HEFCW and the sector to improve widening access data collection and analysis to demonstrate impact, improve performance and showcase the success of widening access policies and practices. We recognise that continuous and systematic data collection and analysis would inform the business case for widening access. As noted above, the Learner Record System will support the tracking of learners' achievement across providers and we encourage the sector to participate fully in these developments.

45. We recognise the importance of evaluating widening access interventions, and publishing the outcomes, to contribute to the sector's evidence base and ensure that we maintain progress towards opening up HE opportunities to under-represented groups. We will take account of UK and international widening access evaluations and data sets to inform policy developments and contextualise the sector's progress and achievements.

We will:

- xxxii. monitor applications from, participation by, and the learning success of different under-represented groups to inform policy developments;
- xxxiii. fund widening access and Reaching Wider strategies that identify and outline actions to deliver challenging outcomes, which align with the widening access priorities set out in this *Approach*;
- xxxiv. systematically collect and disseminate effective practice to demonstrate the sector's success in widening access;
- xxxv. review and monitor fee plan arrangements to ensure alignment between institutional widening access strategic objectives;
- xxxvi. evaluate widening access policies and practice to ensure effective progress towards meeting *For Our Future* expectations and our Corporate Strategy aims.

### Glossary of Terms

14-19 Learning Networks	Learning Pathways 14-19 is an Assembly Government strategy to transform learning provision for young people in Wales. The 14-19 Networks are responsible for planning and delivering a range of programmes based on the local needs of the area. The Networks include partners from all relevant sectors.
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning: The process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning which has already taken place and which may be recognised and compensation awarded when a learner applies to study a different qualification.
<i>Approach</i>	HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan to Widening Access to Higher Education.
Careers Wales	Careers Wales provides free, bilingual, impartial careers information, advice and guidance for all ages.
Children & Young People's Partnerships	A Welsh Assembly Government initiative that provides a context for planning and delivering services for children and young people from 0 - 19 years, care leavers up to 21 (or above if in continuing education or training) and those receiving youth support services (up to the age of 25).
Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol	Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol is the the body to be set up in early 2011 to support and promote Welsh medium higher education, working with and through higher education institutions in Wales.

Communities First	Communities First is the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship programme to improve the living conditions and prospects of people in the most disadvantaged communities across Wales.
Continuation rates	Data collated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency includes generic information on students' progression through university from the year they enter to the following year.
Corporate Strategy	HEFCW's three-year corporate strategy ( 2010-11 to 2012-13) sets out our vision and targets for higher education in Wales. It is HEFCW's response to delivering <i>For Our Future</i> .
CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales: This Assembly Government-led initiative manages and develops a nationally agreed framework which recognises the level and volume of an individual's learning and demonstrates its equivalence to other learning programmes or qualifications.
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). This is a process used by public bodies such as HEFCW to ensure that we do not discriminate in our services, functions, policies and employment and that we do all we can to promote equality and good relations between different groups.
FE	Further Education Institutions.
<i>For our Future</i>	<i>For Our Future, The Twenty-First Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales</i> is the Assembly Government's strategy for Higher Education published in November 2009.
Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark	The Frank Buttle Trust set up the Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education in 2006 to recognise those universities that have demonstrated their commitment to supporting students who have been in public care.
HE	Higher Education.

HEA	The Higher Education Academy work with UK universities and colleges, providing national leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice about enhancing the student learning experience.
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions.
Learning Coach Developments	The Assembly Government established <i>The Teaching and Learning Programme</i> , which includes the Subject Learning Coaches Programme. It is designed to provide learner support to increase learner motivation, improve retention, enhance success and boost teacher and trainer morale.
Learning Records Service	The Learning Records Service is a UK pilot information technology-based project to enable the sharing of learner records across the whole education sector.
Programme bending	Programme 'bending', is a term used by the Wales Audit Office in its report on Communities First (2009) to describe the process of closely aligning existing Welsh Assembly and other policies and programmes with Communities First priorities.
Progression pathways	Progression Pathways should identify for learners the next level of learning available to them to enable them to increase their skills or qualifications.
Regional framework	<i>For our Future, the 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales</i> (November 2009) the Assembly Government strategy for higher education set an expectation that HEFCW and universities would develop a regional dimension to planning and delivery of higher education to improve collaboration, meet local and regional learning needs and priorities.
RPL	The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) involves considering a student's previous certified and uncertified learning in order to grant exemptions from some or all elements of a study programme.

RW Initiative	Reaching Wider is an Assembly Government initiative, established in 2002 and managed by HEFCW, as a widening access mechanism to break down perceived barriers and widen access to learning. The Wales-wide initiative supports social justice and promoting a buoyant economy.
RW Partnerships	Reaching Wider Partnerships: Regional Reaching Wider Partnerships have been established under the Reaching Wider Initiative to co-ordinate collaborative widening access activities across Wales.
SETQC	Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee: A sub committee of HEFCW's Council.
Supporting Professionalism in Admissions	The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme was established in 2006 and works closely with higher education institutions, schools and colleges and other stakeholders on the continuing development of fair admissions and good practice in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation across the UK higher education sector.
<i>The Skills that Work for Wales</i>	A Welsh Assembly Government <i>Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan for Wales</i> . The strategy provides a Wales-focused response to the <i>Leitch Review of Skills (Prosperity for all in the global economy-world class skills)</i> , December 2006, in the UK and <i>The Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education (Promise and Performance)</i> December 2007 . The strategy was published in July 2008.
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the UK organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses.

UHOVI	Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) is a strategic partnership between the Universities of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport. Working closely with further education colleges and training providers, local communities and businesses operating in the Heads of the Valleys, UHOVI will develop industry-specific skills tailored to the needs of the region to support economic and social regeneration.
Unleashing Aspirations	The UK Government's Response to the <i>Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, January 2010</i> . The report demonstrates our commitment to improving access to the professions and widening participation in higher education and new opportunities.
UUK	Universities UK: The major representative body and membership organisation for the higher education sector. Its members are the executive heads of UK universities.
Widening Access	Widening Access policies and practices aim to ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education to enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees.
Widening Access Task and Finish Group	Widening Access Task and Finish Group: A Sub Group of HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee.

**Membership of HEFCW's Student Experience Teaching and Quality Committee's (SETQC) Widening Access Task and Finish Group**

Katie Dalton or Sophie Buchaillard-Davies, National Union of Students, Wales  
Jacqui Hare, HEW nominee  
Rob Humphreys, Regional Director, The Open University in Wales  
Dr Peter Noyes, Higher Education Wales nominee or Viv Davies, his representative and Universities Association of Lifelong Learning Cymru Chair  
Richard Spear, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Dysgu Cymru  
Prof Alan Speight, Chair of Reaching Wider Partnerships  
Gavin Thomas, Colegau Cymru  
Lisa Newberry or Greg Walker, Higher Education Wales

Officers

Dr David Blaney (Task and Finish Group Chair)  
Celia Hunt  
Jane Johns (Secretariat)  
Rachel O'Gorman

**Expert Witnesses and Organisations contributing to the Task and Finish Group's strategic discussions**

Expert Witnesses

Bryn Davies, Colegau Cymru  
Dr Hywel Davies, Joint Chair of the UCAS Welsh Standing Group, Director of Recruitment and Admissions, Aberystwyth University;  
Jackie Doodson, Colegau Cymru  
Owen Evans, Business in the Community  
Janet Graham, Director of the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA)  
John Graystone, Colegau Cymru  
Prof Leni Oglesby, Member of Council, Chair of SETQC  
Malcolm Maguire, Assembly Government-commissioned consultant on *Student withdrawal from HE* (May 2009)  
Professor Danny Saunders, Wales Employment and Skills Board, University of Glamorgan  
John Selby, Member of HEFCW's Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee, formerly HEFCE Director (Education & Participation)  
Professor Liz Thomas, Higher Education Academy

Organisations

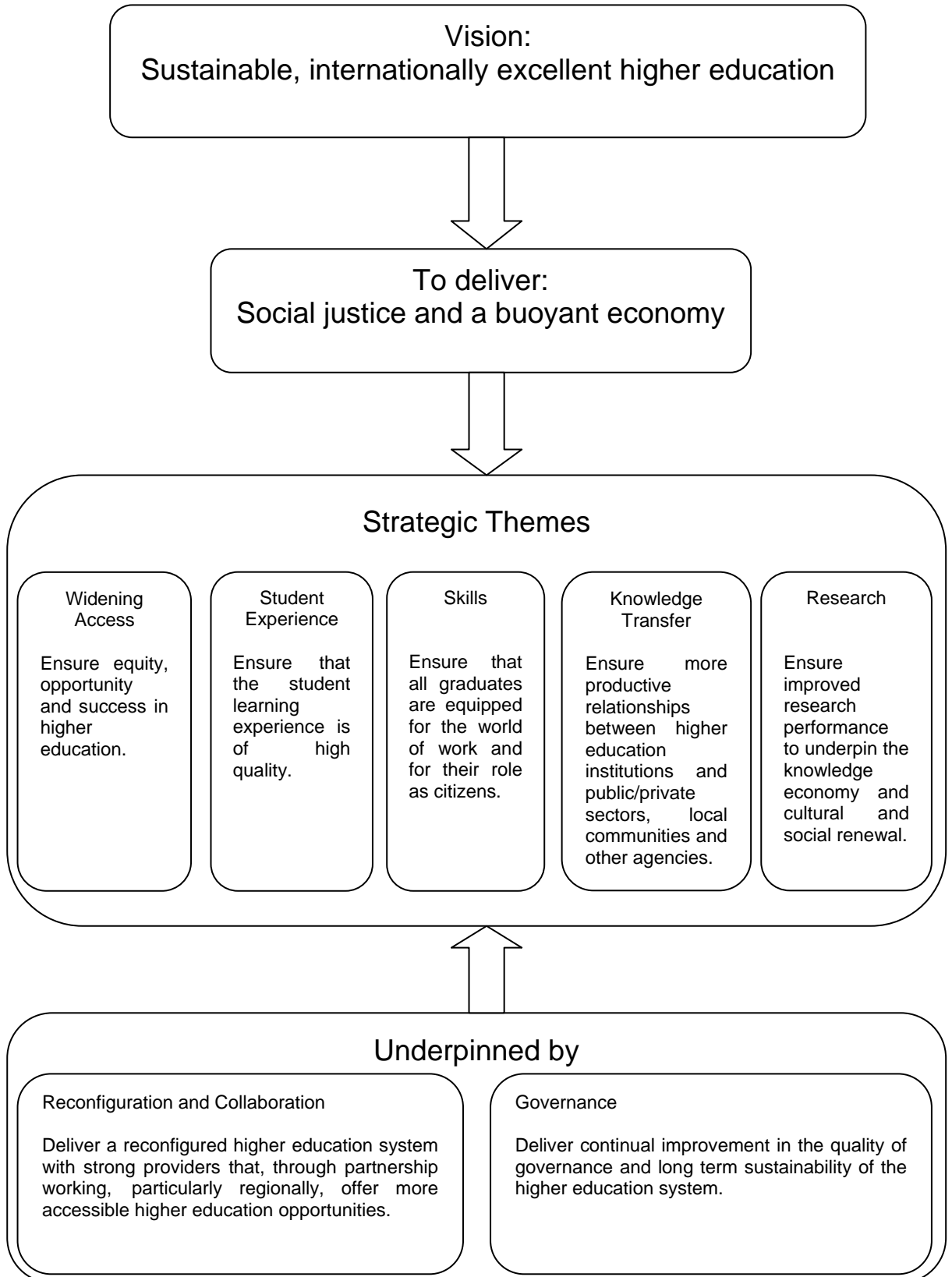
Association of the Managers of Student Services in Higher Education  
Higher Education Wales Pro Vice-Chancellors' Group  
Universities Association of Lifelong Learning Cymru

In addition SETQC members received and commented on the *HEFCW Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* at several stages during its development. SETQC membership is available at:

[http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/council\\_and\\_committees/council\\_and\\_committees.as](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/council_and_committees/council_and_committees.as)

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Corporate Strategy Strategic Themes



## HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010/11 to 2012/13

### Key Strategic Theme: Widening Access

#### ***To ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education***

*'Social justice is a key Welsh Assembly Government priority. Higher education has an important contribution to make to this aim in terms of widening access. The Welsh sector continues to perform well against UK performance indicators in this area but we want to see a continuing drive for further improvement. During the period of this strategy we will refocus our approach to widening access, including the Reaching Wider Initiative. We will drive strategic approaches to widening access for all ages through our revised funding arrangements, including through premium payments. We will encourage higher education providers to improve the evidence base, including data collection, to inform their strategies and to demonstrate impact and success. There will be a particular focus on part-time (including innovative approaches to flexible and work-based) provision, fair access to the professions and on retention – with an emphasis on helping students to complete their learning objectives successfully. We will continue to focus our widening access programmes on the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First programme and will strengthen our funding drivers to support our widening access objectives.*

*A fundamental new element in this corporate strategy is the requirement for a regional approach to the planning and delivery of higher education. This approach will deliver improved progression rates to, and through, higher education, by the end of the strategy period. During the period of this strategy we will work with partners to support the Universities Heads of the Valleys Initiative. We will review the structures of our Reaching Wider partnerships to further align with our regional approach. We will work with Welsh Assembly Government officials to rationalise student bursary arrangements, including through fee plan arrangements.*

*In the area of Widening Access we will work particularly towards the following For our Future priorities:*

- i. participation is maximised through different and more flexible ways to experience higher education, including through part time study*
- ii. inconsistencies in access and opportunity are addressed*
- iii. refocus our approach to widening access to higher education.'*

## Widening Access Measures of Success Additional Information

### Communities First Measure

The Communities First measure provides some continuity for planning and delivery, as these areas have been our focus since 2002. These areas provide a Wales-specific dimension to our work, while complementing the UK-wide performance indicator data relating to low participation neighbourhoods. However, this new Communities First measure has been developed to:

- include Communities First areas across Wales, rather than the previous 100 most deprived wards;
- take account of all students, including postgraduates, instead of only first year entrants: thus improving the measurement of HEIs' progress in recruiting and retaining Communities First learners; and
- focus on the proportion of students, rather than absolute student numbers: to continue to ensure the overall percentage of widening access students does not fall, particularly given funding and capping limitations.

### Module Completion Measure

A module completion measure, rather than focusing on non-continuation (the UK performance indicator) recognises the role of (i) the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and (ii) HEFCW's funding by credit. These factors enable Welsh HEIs to offer flexible, modular provision, facilitating learners movement in and out of the system according to their learning needs, working patterns and lifestyle<sup>23</sup>. This measure includes both full-time and part-time undergraduates and we recognise that this strong focus on the learning success of *all* students will contribute to improving completion rates for widening access students.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills](http://www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills)