



**REPORT**

**HEFCW Stakeholder Survey 2007**

**Higher Education Funding Council Wales**

**April 2008**

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## 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In September 2007 the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) commissioned Strategic Marketing to undertake its first independent Stakeholder Survey. The survey covered the institutions it funds and partner organisations in Wales and elsewhere in the UK.
- 1.2 The objectives of the survey were to obtain the views of external stakeholders about the services HEFCW provides and about its relationship with those organisations.
- 1.3 The following range of issues was to be covered in the survey:
  - knowledge/awareness and views of HEFCW
  - perceptions of HEFCW's role
  - perceptions of the quality of service and support
  - contact and dealings with staff
  - effectiveness of methods of communication
  - effectiveness of relationships with partners/stakeholders
  - priority areas for improvement

## 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In November 2007 HEFCW undertook an independent online survey of Stakeholders amongst Institutions and Partner organisations in Wales and Partner organisations elsewhere in the UK. The questionnaire was largely quantitative with only a few open questions.
- 2.2 There were 65 responses (71% response rate) from Institutions and 48 responses from Partners (59% response rate)
- 2.3 In February/March 2008 a series of follow up telephone interviews were undertaken with selected institutions and Partners in order to understand the reasons behind some of the quantitative results.

### Results from Institutions

#### Reputation

- 2.4 Overall opinion of HEFCW is very or mostly favourable amongst almost three quarters of respondents and more favourable than all other bodies associated with higher education. Almost 70% of respondents rated quality of staff as fairly or very good.
- 2.5 Only 30% of respondents however believe that HEFCW's reputation amongst HE institutions is fairly or very good. A similar rating was given to the effectiveness of the Council.
- 2.6 HEFCW is also strongly rated in relation to other organisations in terms of service provided – 54% rate HEFCW as 'above average' or 'one of the best'.
- 2.7 More than 80% of respondents see HEFCW as an agent of the Welsh Assembly Government. However, just over 50% of respondents also see HEFCW as an advocate or spokesperson for the HE sector. A significant minority of respondents do not see HEFCW as an effective advocate for the sector.
- 2.8 Opinions are divided on whether HEFCW takes account of the effects of its requirements on institutions. Some respondents see HEFCW as understanding the effects but having to implement WAG decisions, others believe that HEFCW does not understand the effects of its requirements on Institutions. Many Institutions do not believe that HEFCW represents the sector's views adequately to WAG on this issue.
- 2.9 Opinions are also divided on whether HEFCW is primarily a regulatory body. This may be due differences in interpretation of 'regulatory'.

#### Descriptions of HEFCW

- 2.10 When asked to respond to some phrases or adjectives describing HEFCW, positive views outweigh negative views except on bureaucracy and innovation. The strongest areas are seen to be approachability, effectiveness, in touch with institutions and respected.
- 2.11 Two thirds of respondents see HEFCW as fairly or very bureaucratic. In the telephone discussions, many respondents, but not all, tended to believe that

bureaucracy was to be expected given the nature of HEFCW's relationship with WAG. However, this did not prevent many respondents from providing examples of 'unnecessary' bureaucracy. Negative views expressed about 'slow to change' and 'inflexible' also tended to reflect comments about bureaucracy.

- 2.12 Where views were expressed that HEFCW is out of touch with the institutions it funds, the feeling was that HEFCW does not have sufficient understanding of the way institutions operate.
- 2.13 Some institutions see HEFCW as not transparent in the way it operates. Lack of feedback and not explaining the reasons for its decisions are key factors contributing to this view.
- 2.14 On a number of descriptions there are significant proportions of respondents that are undecided. This is surprising given the status of respondents and represents a significant opportunity or threat for HEFCW to address.

#### **Service and support**

- 2.15 Almost 40% of respondents believe that service from HEFCW has got slightly better in the last 12 months whereas almost 50% perceive no change.
- 2.16 In most departments around 40% to 50% of respondents report a level of service that is very or fairly good, but there are relatively high proportions of respondents with mixed views or 'don't know'. The high number of 'don't knows' is surprising and HEFCW should be attempting to convert these to have positive opinions.
- 2.17 Across all aspects of service a small proportion (2% to 22% depending on the service aspect) of respondents perceive service to have improved in 2007. Electronic communications and face-to-face contact are the areas most improved. Going forward Institutions would like HEFCW to continue developing personal relationships and to engage in dialogue with the sector.
- 2.18 Almost one third of respondents believe however that the administrative burden has increased. A key concern is the number of initiatives and the need for detailed strategies to bid for small pots of money. The tendency for HEFCW to micro-manage these initiatives is a frequently mentioned issue.

#### **Effectiveness**

- 2.19 In terms of its service to each Institution, HEFCW is seen to be very or fairly effective in most service areas by close to or above 60% of respondents. A small proportion of respondents consider HEFCW to be ineffective, although 'analysis and feedback on strategic plans' is seen to be not very or not at all effective by 31% of respondents.
- 2.20 Those that consider feedback on strategic plans to be ineffective complain of a focus on peripheral rather than strategic issues and the length of time between plan submission and feedback.
- 2.21 In terms of the sector as a whole, HEFCW is seen to be very or fairly effective by around 40% to 50% of respondents across a range of activities. Almost a quarter of respondents feel that the service to the sector as a whole has got slightly better in 2007 with only 6% thinking it has got slightly worse.

- 2.22 Support for widening access and participation and policy development and consultation are the strongest activities. The weakest activities are support for enhancement of research and support for leadership, governance and management.
- 2.23 For a number of activities there were also significant minority proportions of respondents with negative views on the effectiveness of HEFCW. Themes that emerged from discussions with respondents about these negative areas were:
- HEFCW is not seen to be able to represent the sector to WAG because WAG are the paymasters.
  - HEFCW not seen as committed to addressing leadership, governance and management issues.
  - Whether it was HEFCW's role to be involved in support for enhancement of research. Criticisms from younger universities that HEFCW was restricting their research development.
  - The funding gap in Wales compared to England is a major issue to overcome in the enhancement of teaching and learning, and HEFCW is not seen to be adequately engaged with the sector.
  - HEFCW is not seen as the appropriate body to support links with business.

#### **Contact and dealings with HEFCW**

- 2.24 Around 60% of respondents are 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the relationship between their institution and HEFCW and just over 1 in 5 feel that the relationship has got a little or a lot better in 2007.
- 2.25 A minority of respondents are seeking more contact with HEFCW staff. The highest requests are for staff responsible for policy development (29%), the Chief Executive (23%) and other Council Members (20%). This reflects a consistent theme through the research for HEFCW to engage more with the sector on a personal level in order to build trust and understanding.

#### **Communications**

- 2.26 Three quarters of respondents felt that HEFCW communicates fairly or very well with their institution.
- 2.27 The top 5 preferred communication channels are direct contact with HEFCW staff, circulars, website, seminars and meetings and the Newsletter.
- 2.28 Direct contact with HEFCW staff is by far the preferred means of communication. There are several reasons for this:
- Written communications are generally seen to be too long and lack clarity.
  - Personal contact improves understanding, resolves issues and builds trust

- New developments are not always brought to the attention of appropriate staff in Institutions and personal contact improves confidence that nothing has been missed
- 2.29 The Newsletter is low on the list of communications channels actually used by Institutions. This suggests that it could be improved and better targeted.
- 2.30 The vast majority (85%) of respondents are in favour of HEFCW's increasing use of web-based communications; targeted email communications particularly are seen to have helped.
- 2.31 HEFCW is seen to be poor in terms of achieving coverage in the media, particularly in comparison with HEFCE. Opinions are divided on whether HEFCW should or should not look for a greater media profile, although there is considerable support for publicising the contribution that Higher Education makes to Wales.
- 2.32 Whilst half of respondents find feedback on their Strategic Plans fairly or very useful, around one third has the opposite view. Improvements sought by respondents are more constructive dialogue at the strategic level and face-to-face discussions, not just written responses.
- 2.33 60% of respondents agree strongly or slightly that they have the ability to provide feedback to HEFCW and slightly less feel that HEFCW acts on the feedback it receives.

#### **Publications**

- 2.34 In general HEFCW's publications are well received. Statistical publications, explanatory guides and publications relating to HEFCW's business are found to be fairly or very useful by the large majority of respondents (around 80%).
- 2.35 Whilst over 40% of respondents find HEFCW's Annual Report and Corporate Plan fairly or very useful, almost the same number of respondents has the opposite opinion. The key suggestions for improvement are to make the documents more visionary and succinct.

#### **Activities and policies**

- 2.36 A significant proportion of respondents would like to know more about a range of HEFCW's activities. Policies on reviewing institutions strategic planning is top of the list (55%) followed by HE within FE (45%) and capital funding (46%).
- 2.37 There is also a significant proportion of respondents that would like to know more about support and policies for reconfiguration and collaboration (55%), links with business and the community (49%) and leadership, governance and management (42%).

#### **Area for improvement in the next 3 years**

- 2.38 Respondents were asked what HEFCW's key areas for improvement should be over the next three years. This was an open question to which 33 responses were received. The themes to emerge from this were:
- Improve representation of the sector to WAG
  - Work more closely with the sector

- Reduce micro-management
- Continue to improve electronic communication
- Adopt a more strategic approach to the sector including the approach to funding

## **Results from Partners**

### **Reputation**

- 2.39 Almost 90% of Partner organisations have a mostly or very favourable opinion of HEFCW. Half of respondents believe that HEFCW has a fairly or very good reputation amongst institutions in Wales. A similar rating is given to HEFCW Council. These are significantly more positive than the Institution's view.
- 2.40 Staff receive a high rating with almost 80% of respondents rating the quality of staff as fairly or very good.
- 2.41 Just over 80% of respondents see HEFCW as an agent of the Welsh Assembly Government with around 60% seeing HEFCW as an advocate for the sector. This is similar to the Welsh Institutions view.
- 2.42 Most respondents (around 80%) see HEFCW as working in partnership with Institutions and other sector bodies. This is a much more positive view than the Institutions.

### **Descriptions of HEFCW**

- 2.43 The pattern of responses is very similar to the Welsh Institutions, but views are generally more positive. The most favourable ratings are approachability and effectiveness.

### **Contact and dealings with HEFCW**

- 2.44 Most respondents (83%) are fairly or very satisfied with the relationship between their organisation and HEFCW. Just over one third of respondents feel that their relationship with HEFCW has got a little or a lot better in 2007. The majority perceive no change.
- 2.45 Views from respondents about what HEFCW should do to continue the improvements in relationships focused on building relationships, trust and openness.

### **Communications**

- 2.46 Three quarters of respondents feel that HEFCW communicates fairly or very well with their Institution.
- 2.47 Direct contact with staff is by far the most preferred and actual means of communication to find out about HEFCW's activities followed by the website, although this is used very infrequently. Relationships are seen as critical to ensuring that the more formal communications are understood and correctly interpreted.

- 2.48 The website would be used more frequently if accessibility and content were simplified. It appears that there is a role for a better Newsletter; respondents were not always clear that there was one.
- 2.49 The move to more web-based communications was welcomed. Almost 90% of respondents view this as fairly or very favourable.
- 2.50 Partners, like Institutions, also see HEFCW as having a poor media presence. Again, similar to Institutions, opinion is divided on whether HEFCW should aim for a higher profile. There is more agreement though that the contribution of HE to Wales should be promoted.
- 2.51 60% of respondents agree slightly or strongly that they have the ability to provide feedback to HEFCW on its work. Almost two thirds of respondents agree slightly or strongly that HEFCW will act on the feedback it receives.

**Publications**

- 2.52 Most publications are considered fairly or very useful by those to whom they are applicable. The Annual Report and Strategic Plan attract more negative comments than other areas.

**Activities and policies**

- 2.53 There are several areas where around 40% of respondents would like to know more about HEFCW's activities. These are Higher Education within Further Education, Policies on reviewing Institutions' strategic planning, and funding methods for teaching and research.
- 2.54 Large numbers of respondents would also like to know more about policies and support for links with business and the community (67%), and for leadership, governance and management (56%). In most other policy and support areas there was still a relatively high requirement (around 30% to 40%) for further information.

**Areas for improvement in the next 3 years**

- 2.55 There were 25 responses to this open question. The main themes to emerge were working more closely with Skills Councils and improved communications.

### **3. Methodology**

- 3.1 The survey was undertaken in two stages. The first stage was an online survey of institutions and Partners in Wales and Partners elsewhere in the UK.
- 3.2 The second stage was a series of semi-structured telephone interviews designed to explore issues arising from the results of the online survey.

#### **Online Questionnaire**

- 3.3 Questionnaires were developed for:
  - HE institutions in Wales
  - Partners in Wales and elsewhere in the UK
- 3.4 The questionnaires were based on similar surveys carried out by HEFCE in England and SFC in Scotland, so that HEFCW could benchmark itself against similar organisations. HEFCW drafted the basic questionnaires with some modifications by Strategic Marketing. The Partner questionnaire was essentially a simplified version of the institution questionnaire.
- 3.5 Both questionnaires were available in hard copy if required rather than online. The institution questionnaire was available in English and Welsh. Fully accessible formats were also available.

#### **Follow-up telephone interviews**

- 3.6 In the online questionnaire, respondents were asked if they would participate in a follow-up telephone interview. Approximately half of the institution respondents agreed and three quarters of the Partners.
- 3.7 Topic guides were developed in conjunction with HEFCW for both institutions and Partners. The topic guides were designed to explore some of the issues arising from the consolidated results of online (quantitative) survey.
- 3.8 The questions tended to focus on negative result areas and where results were polarised between negative and positive.
- 3.9 Interviews with institutions typically lasted 40 minutes; interviews with Partners lasted 15 to 20 minutes.

#### **Online Sample and Responses**

- 3.10 HEFCW provided a list of contacts with email and telephone numbers for the online survey. Contacts were emailed with a request to participate and a link to the online questionnaire.
- 3.11 Reminder emails were sent to non-respondents 2 weeks after distribution of the questionnaire. This was followed by telephone reminders the following week.

3.12 Response rates are shown in the table below.

Category	Number of Contacts	Number of Responses	Response Rate
Institutions	92	65	71%
Partners	82	48	59%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>65%</b>

### Follow up Interview Sample

3.13 Before the research started HEFCW nominated 36 contacts in institutions and 14 in Partner organisations that they wished to interview. We interviewed 26 contacts in Institutions and 10 in Partners.

3.14 A number of the nominated contacts in institutions either did not complete the online survey or declined to be interviewed on the questionnaire. This reduced the potential universe for follow interviews to 48, consisting of 28 who agreed to be interviewed and 20 that did not complete the online questionnaire.

### Timetable of Fieldwork

3.15 The online fieldwork was undertaken between October 2007 and early December 2007. The follow-up telephone interviews were undertaken in February and March 2008. A detailed timetable is shown in the table below.

Date	Activity
	<b>Online Survey</b>
15 <sup>th</sup> – 29 <sup>th</sup> October	Online questionnaires set up and testing
W/C 29 <sup>th</sup> October	Distribution of online questionnaire
W/C 12 <sup>th</sup> November	Reminder emails
W/C 19 <sup>th</sup> November	Telephone reminders
29 <sup>th</sup> November	Online survey closed
	<b>Telephone Interviews</b>
January/February	Develop questionnaire/topic guide
February/March	Undertake interviews

## 4. Analysis and Report Layout

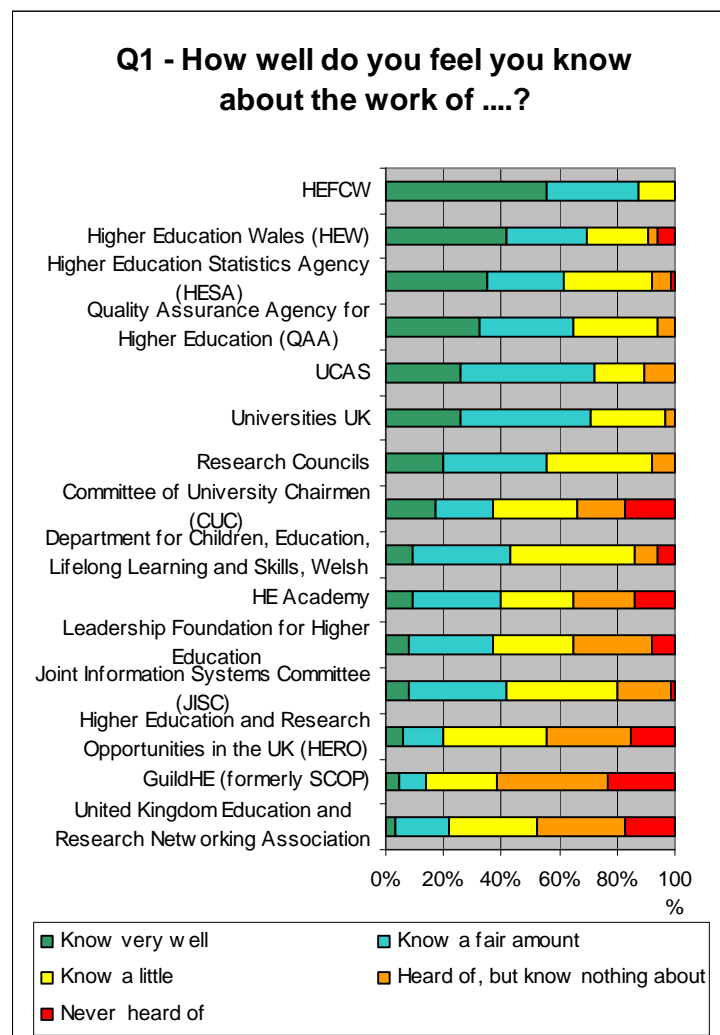
- 4.1 When interpreting the findings it is important to remember that the results are based on a sample of HEFCW's Institutions and Partner organisations not the entire population. Consequently, results are subject to sampling tolerances. The samples are relatively small in statistical terms, but represent a high proportion of the population sampled.
- 4.2 The distribution of job titles of the respondents is shown as part of the analysis.
- 4.3 The analysis is divided into two sections:
  - Section 5 – The Institutions
  - Section 6 – The Partners
- 4.4 Both sections combine the results of the online survey and the follow-up telephone interviews.
- 4.5 Some qualitative data was collected in the online survey.
- 4.6 The telephone follow up survey collected a wealth of information, some of which is difficult to summarise without losing the meaning.
- 4.7 The responses for each question are analysed in the order in which they appear in the online questionnaire.
- 4.8 Results are presented in chart form with the sample size shown below each chart.

## 5. Institutions Survey

### Awareness of HEFCW and other bodies associated with higher education

**Q1. How well do you feel you know about the work of HEFCW and about the work of other bodies listed below which are also associated with higher education?**

- 5.1 In the chart below organisations are ranked in descending order of 'know very well'.
- 5.2 HEFCW is the organisation that respondents feel they know most about the work that it does, although there are a number of other established organisations with high awareness.

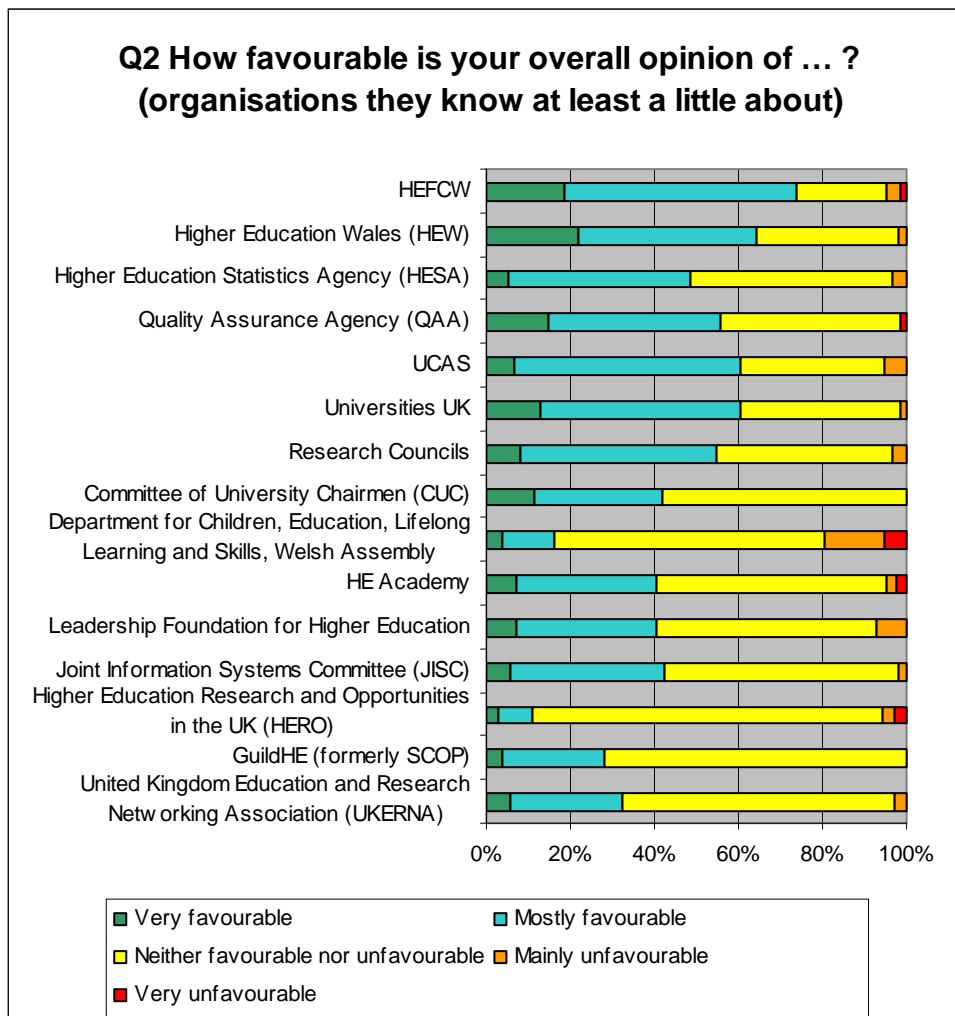


Base 65

## Overall opinion of HEFCW and other bodies associated with higher education

**Q2. For those organisations that you know at least a little about, please indicate how favourable your overall opinion or impression of each is.**

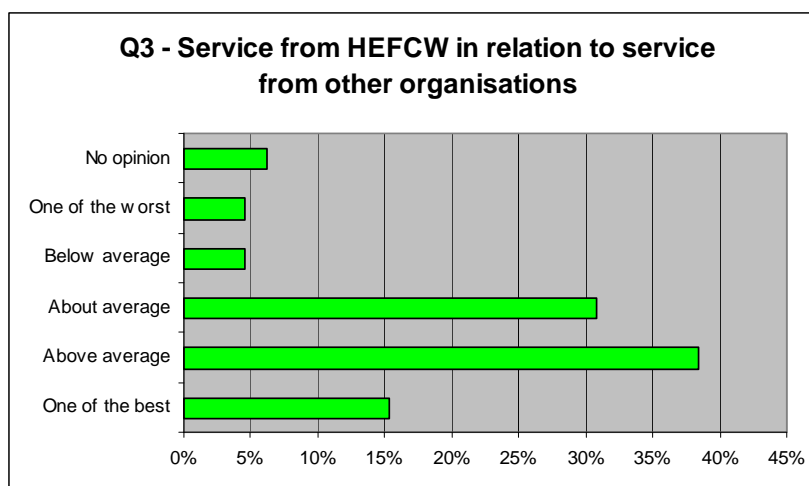
- 5.3 Respondents were asked for their opinion on those institutions that they knew at least 'a little' about. The base sample therefore varies by organization. The results for organisations are presented in the same order as Q1 so sample sizes are higher at the top of the list and vary from 65 to 25.
- 5.4 HEFCW has the most favourable overall rating. 74% of respondents rated HEFCW as very or mostly favourable.
- 5.5 The lowest ratings are for DCELLS and HERO.



Base 25 – 65 (excludes no nothing and never heard of)

**Q3. How would you rate HEFCW in relation to the service they provide your institution, compared to the other bodies you are familiar with?**

- 5.6 HEFCW is strongly rated in relation to other organisations in terms of service provided – 54% rate HEFCW as ‘above average’ or ‘one of the best’



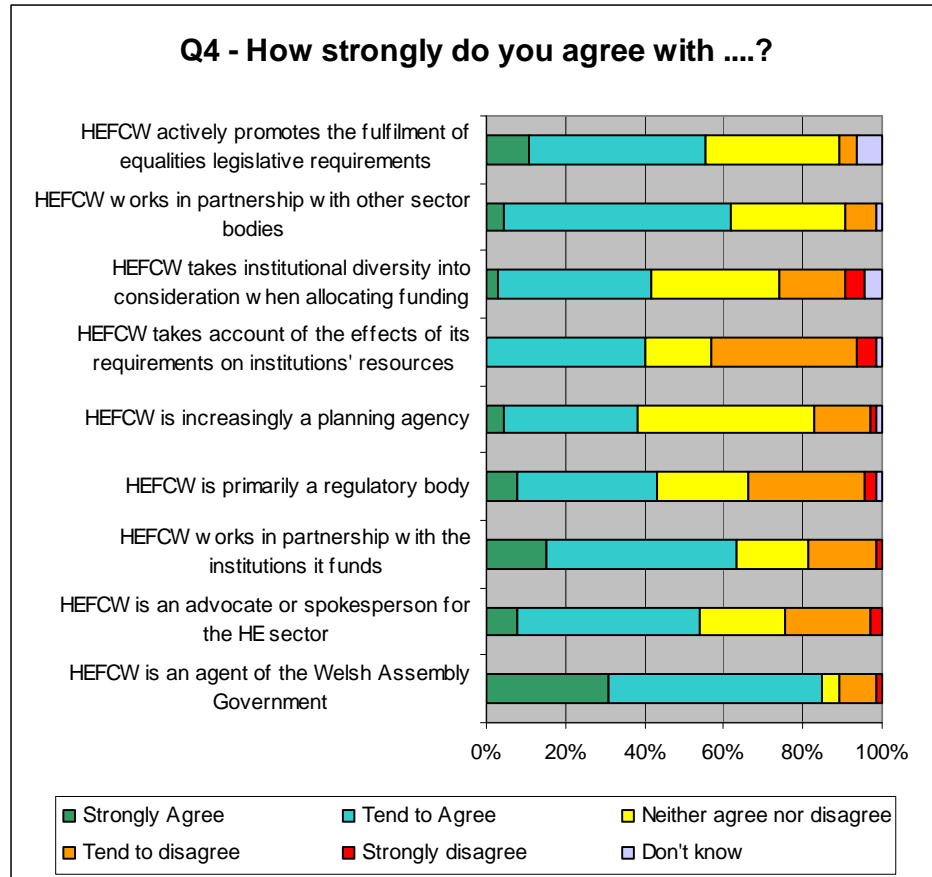
Base 65

## Perceptions of HEFCW

**Q4. Thinking about HEFCW's current role, how strongly do you personally agree with each of the following statements?**

- 5.7 More than 80% of respondents see HEFCW as an agent of the Welsh Assembly Government. However just over 50% of respondents also see HEFCW as an advocate or spokesperson for the HE sector.
- 5.8 There a number of areas where views are either polarised, or significant numbers of respondents hold opposing views.
- 5.9 There are two areas where almost identical numbers of respondents agree and disagree with the statements relating to HEFCW:
- HEFCW takes account of the effects of its requirements on institutions resources
  - HEFCW is primarily a regulatory body
- 5.10 In four other areas there is a significant minority of respondents that disagree with the statements:
- HEFCW takes institutional diversity into consideration when allocating funding
  - HEFCW is increasingly a planning agency

- HEFCW works in partnership with the institutions its funds
- HEFCW is an advocate or spokesperson for the HE sector



Base 65

5.11 In the follow up interviews we asked a number of questions to try and understand why there were different views on:

- Advocacy for the sector
- Status as regulatory body
- Taking account of effects of requirements on institutions

### Why some people do not see HEFCW as an advocate of HE

5.12 A number of respondents expressed the view that HEFCW cannot be an advocate for HE because it is so closely associated with delivering the policies of WAG – more so than HEFCE in England. However they saw HEFCW as having the responsibility for being an advocate. The negative views were also associated with a perceived lack of effectiveness as an advocate for the sector.

### **HEFCW as a regulatory body**

5.13 To some extent the differing views may be due to a difference in interpretation of 'regulatory'. Several comments from respondents that see HEFCW as regulatory refer to the closeness of the monitoring and 'micro' management.

### **Why views are polarised on whether HEFCW takes account of the effects of its requirements on institution's resources.**

5.14 A number of respondents believe that while HEFCW may understand the effect of its requirements, they have to implement decisions made by WAG. Some respondents will see HEFCW not taking account of its requirements: others will be more generous and see HEFCW as following instructions.

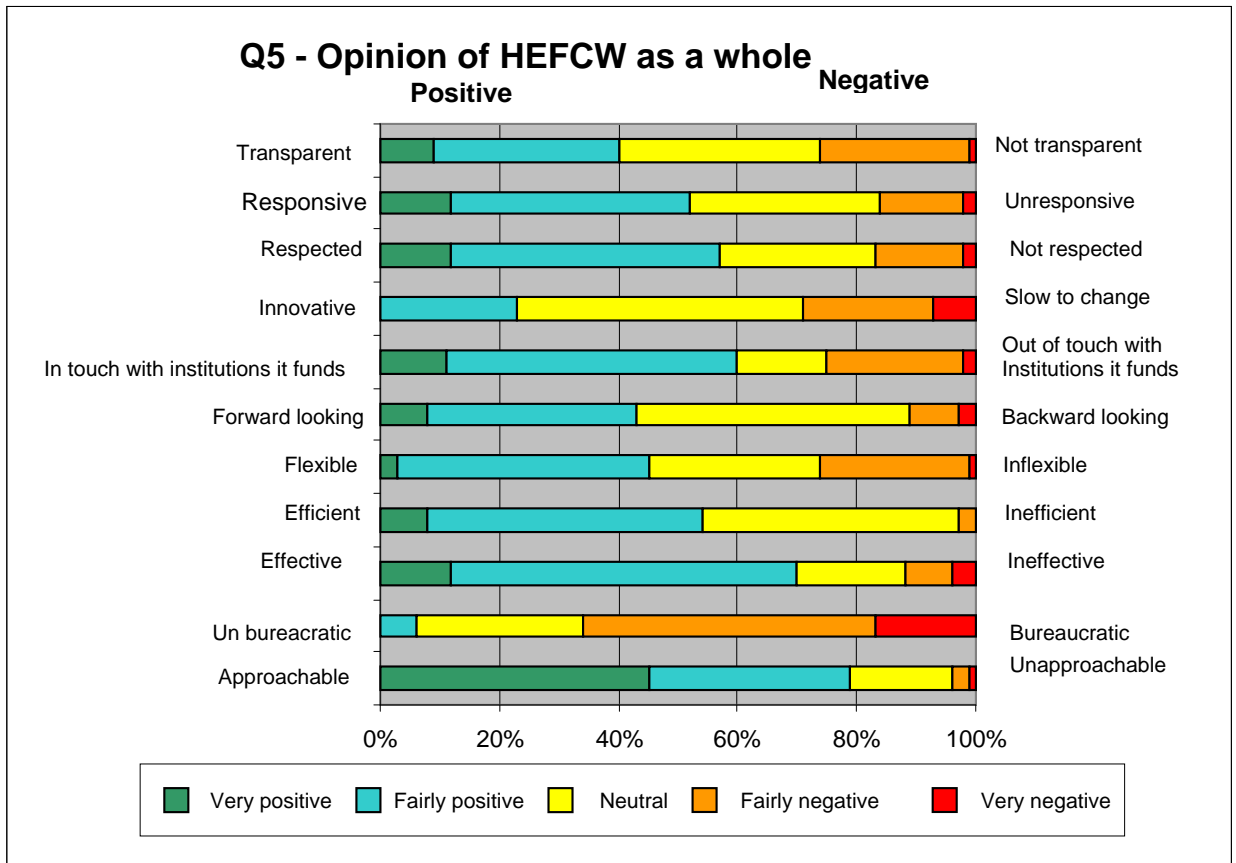
5.15 There are clearly examples of where HEFCW has been seen to take institutions' resources into account and others where it has not. Respondent's views will depend on their recent good or poor experiences.

5.16 Size of institution may also be an issue, in that smaller institutions may experience a disproportionate burden compared to larger ones.

**Q5. Here are some phrases or adjectives which may or may not describe HEFCW. Thinking of HEFCW as a whole, on the scale below please select the circle that comes closest to your opinion.**

5.17 For most of the descriptions of HEFCW the positive views outweigh the negative, but there are some significant negatives and an even larger neutral group of respondents.

5.18 The exceptions are that HEFCW is clearly seen as bureaucratic and slow to change.



Base 65

5.19 In the follow up interviews we asked a number of questions to try and understand why there were negative opinions of HEFCW in relation to being seen as:

- Bureaucratic
- Slow to change
- Inflexible
- Out of touch with the institutions it funds
- Not transparent

### **HEFCW is bureaucratic**

- 5.20 A number of respondents commented that bureaucracy was to be expected given the nature of HEFCW's tasks and its relationship with WAG.

#### Examples of Bureaucracy

- 5.21 The audit process, allocating and monitoring funds and finance are the most bureaucratic. The least bureaucratic areas are seen to be Estates and Procurement

### **HEFCW is slow to change**

- 5.22 The responses to this issue tended to reflect the comments about bureaucracy. There is seen to be a degree of inevitability about this and not all respondents see 'slow to change' as a negative given HEFCW's role.

### **HEFCW is inflexible**

- 5.23 The inflexibility is seen by a number of respondents as a function of WAG control.

### **HEFCW is out of touch with the institutions it funds**

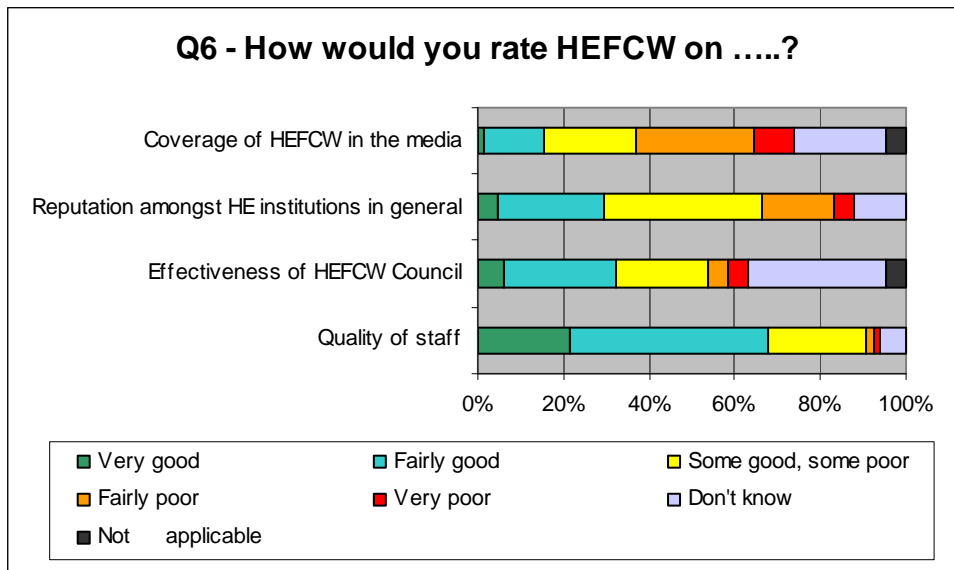
- 5.24 A key theme running through the negative comments is a perceived lack of understanding of how institutions run.

### **HEFCW is not transparent**

- 5.25 HEFCW's position between WAG and the institutions is seen as a key reason for lack of transparency. Lack of feedback and the justification for decisions are other issues.

### **Q6. From your knowledge and experience of HEFCW, how would you rate each of the following?**

- 5.26 Two thirds of respondents rate HEFCW staff as fairly or very good.
- 5.27 Coverage of HEFCW in the media is rated fairly or very poor by 37% - more than double the 16% that rate coverage as good or very good.
- 5.28 Almost one third of respondents rate the effectiveness of the HEFCW council as very good or fairly good, but a similar number don't know.
- 5.29 HEFCW's reputation amongst institutions in general is only rated good by 30% of respondents, with 22% rating poor. There are also a large number of 'floating' voters.



Base 65

5.30 In the follow up interviews we asked a number of questions to try and understand why there were negative opinions of HEFCW in relation to:

- Coverage in the media
- Reputation of HEFCW amongst institutions

**What is meant by poor coverage in the media?**

5.31 A significant number of people commented that they had rarely, if ever, seen any mention of HEFCW in the press. In comparison there is a perception that HEFCE gets good coverage in the UK national press and is far more proactive on behalf of institutions.

5.32 Opinions were divided on whether HEFCW should be more visible in the media.

**What sort of media coverage people want**

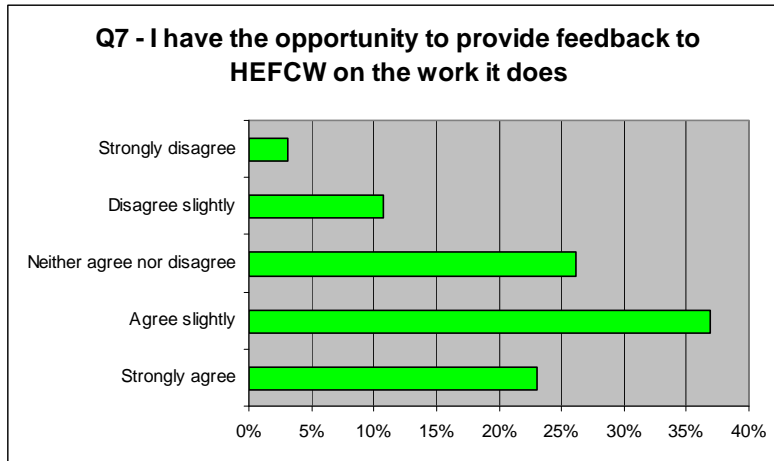
5.33 Respondents wanted coverage that championed the contribution that HE makes to the Wales economy. Some also wanted the issue of the funding gap raised for a public debate.

**HEFCW's reputation amongst HE institutions**

5.34 The reasons why some respondents see HEFCW's reputation as poor are reflected in the issues discussed earlier in Q5.

**Q7. Based on my experience, I have the opportunity to provide feedback to HEFCW on the work it does.**

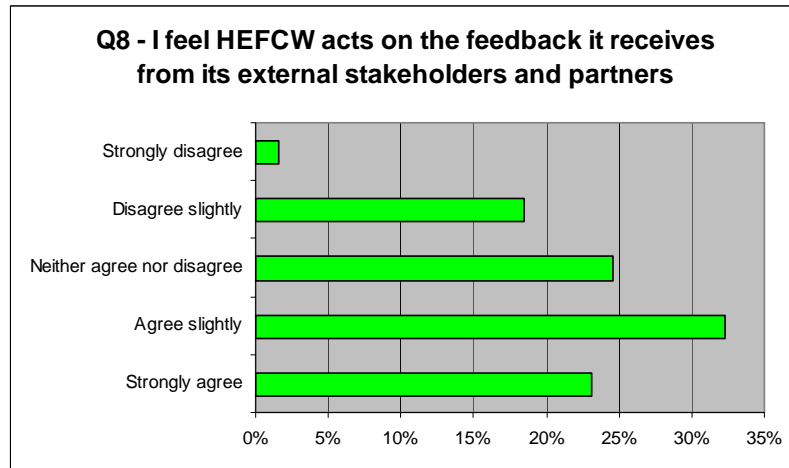
5.35 60% of respondents agree strongly or slightly that they have the opportunity to provide feedback to HEFCW on its work. This far outweighs the 14% that disagree.



Base 65

**Q8. Based on my experience, I feel HEFCW acts (or will act) on the feedback it receives from its external stakeholders and partners.**

5.36 55% of respondents agree slightly or strongly that HEFCW acts or will act on feedback it receives from its stakeholders and partners.

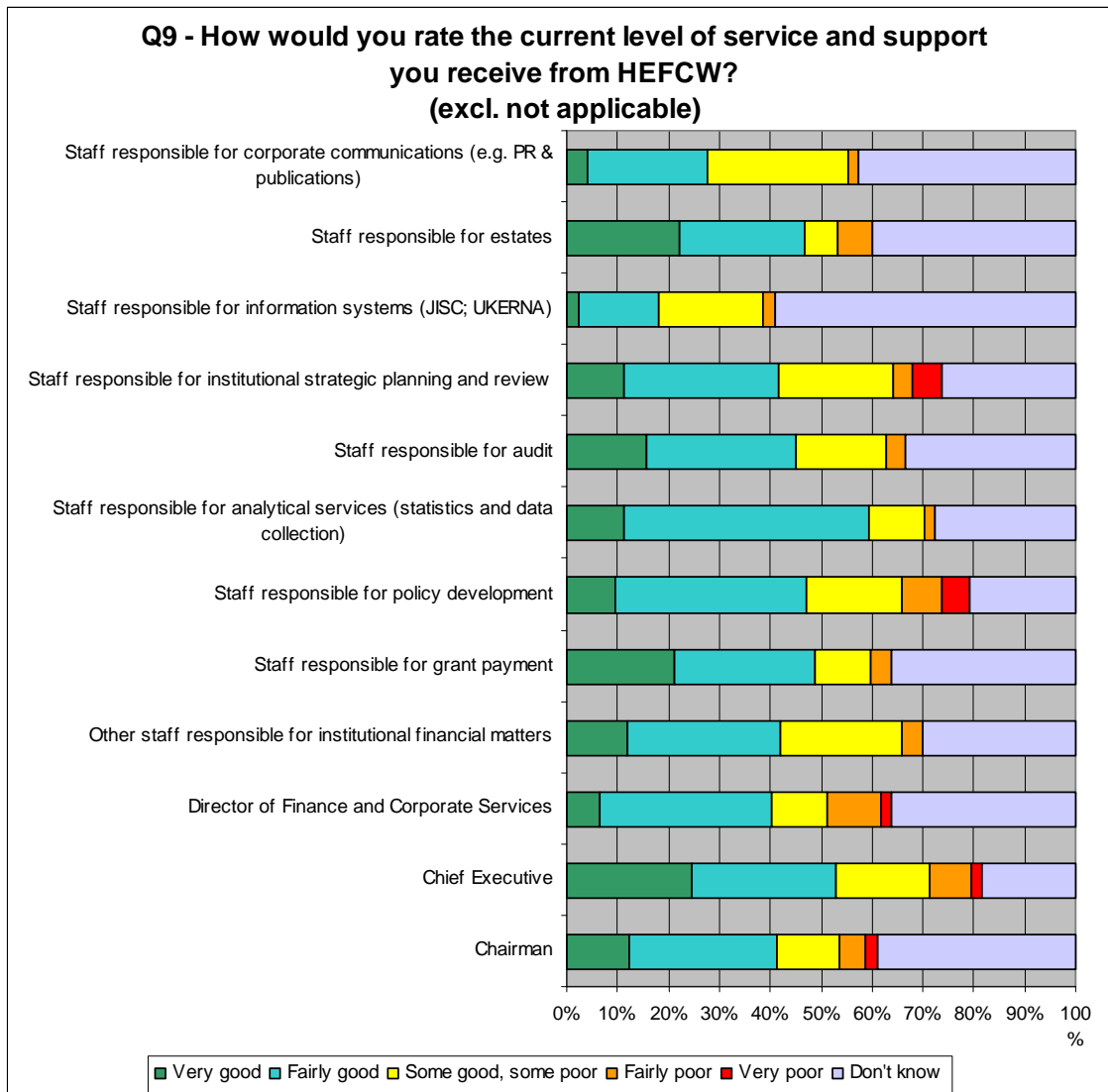


Base 65

## Service and support from HEFCW

**Q9. How would you rate the current level of service and support you receive from HEFCW from each of the following?**

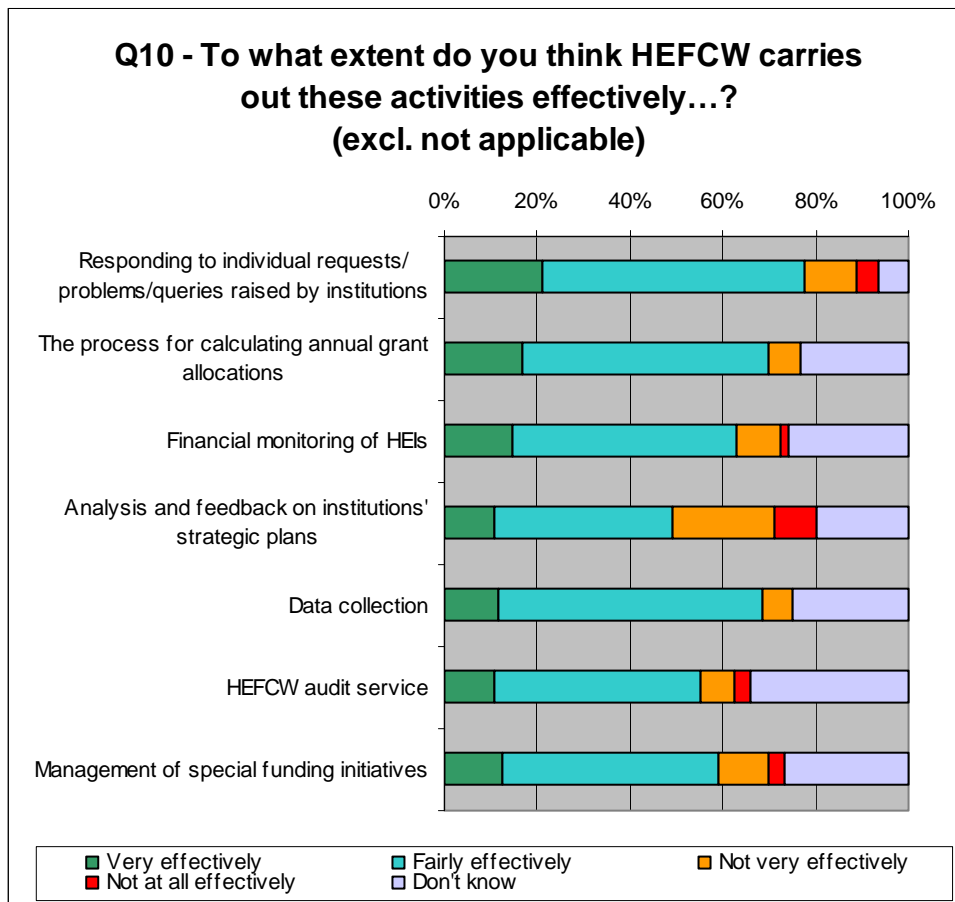
- 5.37 The sample size varies from 41 to 54 because we have excluded those respondents that felt that a staff area was not applicable to them.
- 5.38 The number of 'don't knows' is surprisingly high and perhaps includes respondents that should have declared the service area as not applicable.
- 5.39 The overall level of service is generally good amongst those respondents registering an opinion. Most staff areas attain 40% or above as very good or fairly good. The proportion of respondents dissatisfied with the service is low.



Base 41 -54 (excludes not applicable)

**Q10. Thinking about your own institution, to what extent do you feel the following aspects of HEFCW's activities are carried out effectively?**

- 5.40 The sample size for each staff area varies because we have excluded from the sample those respondents that felt that the specific area was not applicable to them. Sample sizes vary from 54 to 62 respondents.
- 5.41 HEFCW is seen to carry out most of these services effectively by 60% or more of respondents with only a small number of respondents considering HEFCW is not effective.
- 5.42 The weakest area is analysis and feedback on institutions strategic plans which a relatively high proportion of respondents (31%) considering HEFCW to be ineffective.
- 5.43 Again there are surprisingly high levels of don't knows for most areas.



Base 54 - 62

5.44 In the follow up interviews we asked about the negative opinions of HEFCW in relation to analysis and feedback on institutions strategic plans.

**Analysis and feedback on institutions strategic plans is not very or not at all effective**

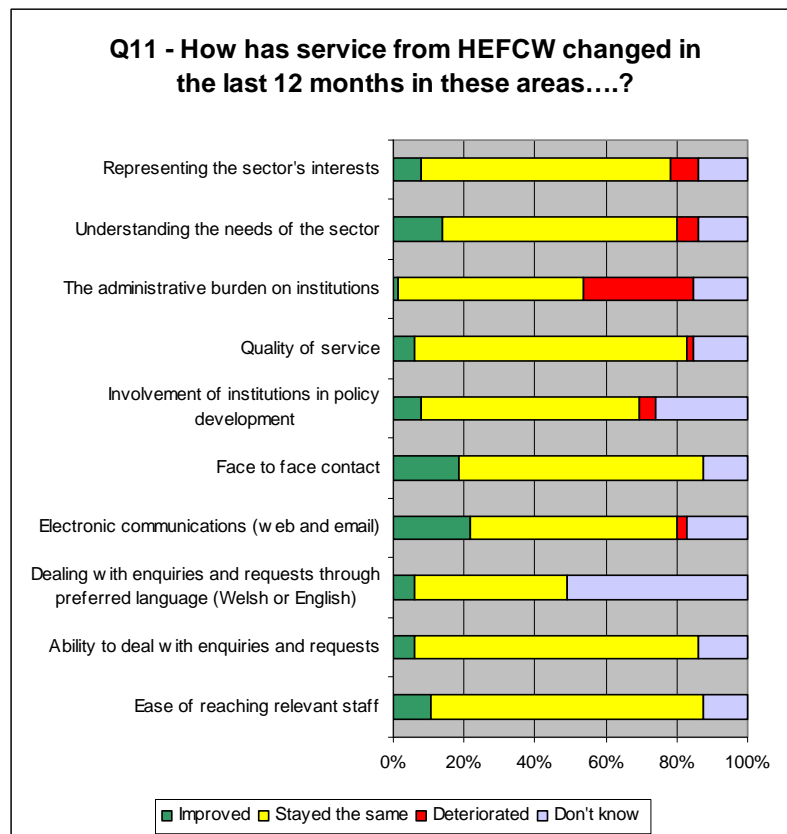
5.45 Key points made were that feedback was not constructive and tended to focus on peripheral issues. Feedback was also seen as being too late to be of use.

5.46 A number of respondents commented on whether HEFCW should be involved at all in reviewing plans which are the responsibility of the institution

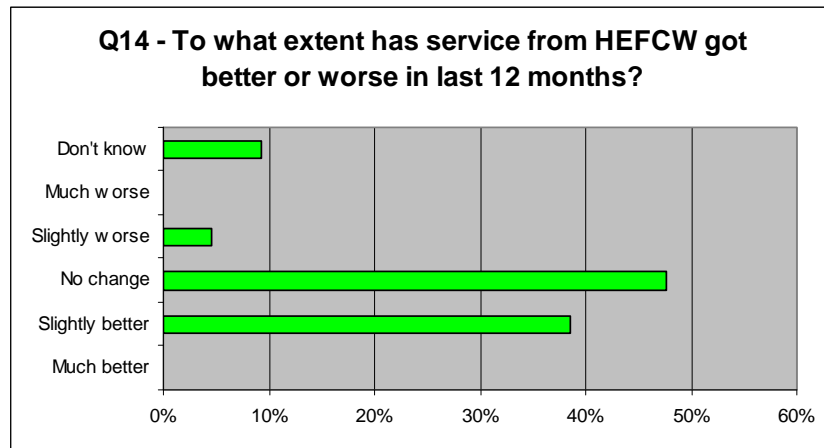
**Q11. Have the following areas of service provided to your institution by HEFCW improved, stayed the same or deteriorated over the last 12 months?**

**Q14 To what extent do you feel the service HEFCW provides to your institution has got better or worse over the last 12 months?**

- 5.47 A relatively small proportion of respondents report an improvement in service from HEFCW in a number of areas. However almost 40% think the overall service has got slightly better. The most significant gains have been in face-to-face contact and the use of electronic communications.
- 5.48 However, almost one third (31%) of respondents believe that the administrative burden on their institution has increased.



Base 65



Base 65

### Examples of increases in administrative burden

5.49 In the follow up interviews we asked for examples of where the administrative burden had increased. A selection of examples are:

- Increasing need for individual strategies to be submitted to HEFCW
- Too many low value initiatives
- Too many requests for information on initiatives
- The audit function is more burdensome than in England

### Q12. If you think any of the areas above (Q11) have improved in the last 12 months – could you please elaborate?

5.50 Question 12 was a free text response without any prompts. The key improvement themes are:

- Better electronic communications
- More personal contact and involvement

### Q13. If you think any of the above (Q11) areas have deteriorated over the last 12 months, could you cite examples?

5.51 Question 13 was a free text response without any prompts. Responses are listed below. There are no clear themes, but areas mentioned recur in other parts of the survey, particularly the tendency to micro-manage.

5.52 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked on which aspects of service HEFCW should focus its attention in order to continue to improve service to their institution.

5.53 A key theme to emerge was to continue developing personal contacts and engage more with the sector.

**Q15. Thinking about the HE sector as a whole, to what extent do you feel the following aspects of HEFCW's activities are carried out effectively?**

5.54 The most effective areas are seen to be:

- Support for widening access and participation
- Policy development and consultation

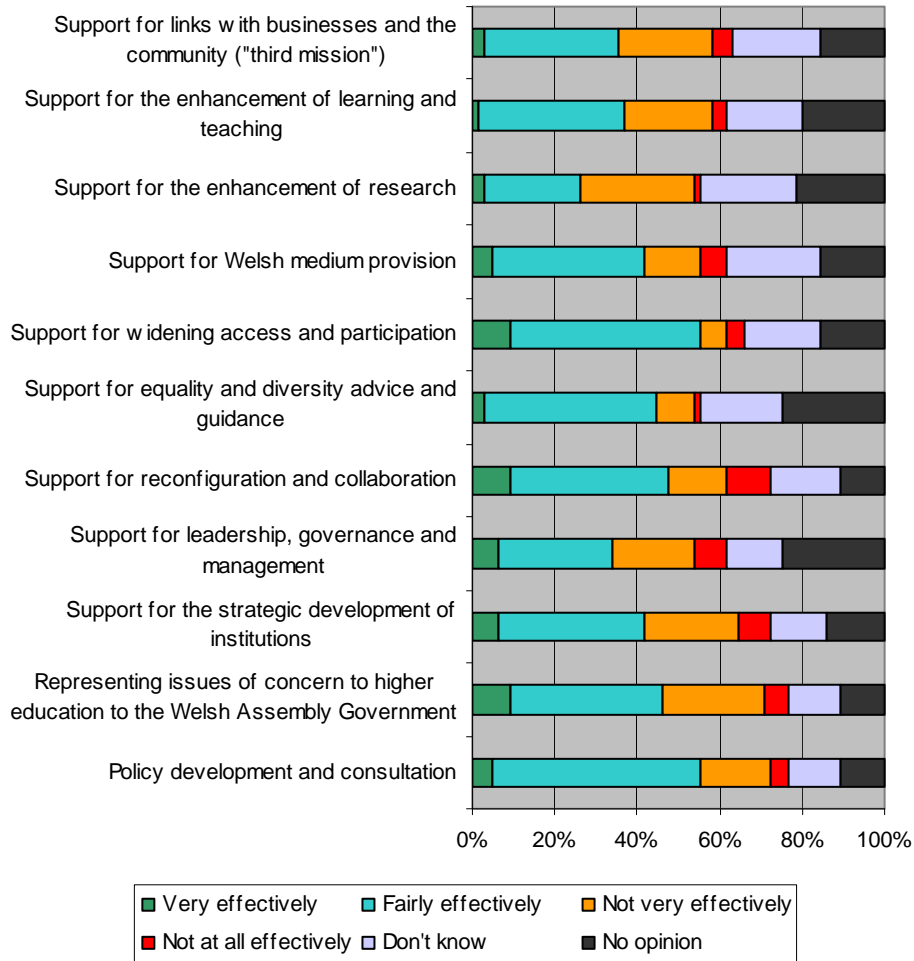
5.55 The least effective areas are seen to be:

- Support for the enhancement of research – the negative views outweigh the positive.
- Support for leadership governance and management

5.56 There are significant minority proportions of negative views in many of the areas.

5.57 The proportion of 'don't know' and 'no opinion' should be of concern to HEFCW.

**Q15 - To what extent do you feel HEFCW's activities are carried out effectively for the sector as a whole**



Base 65

5.58 Only 7 responses were received to the open question 'any other areas that HEFCW needs to address? Three key requests are:

- Inequality of funding mechanisms between Wales, England and Scotland.
- Support for enhancement of research.
- Ongoing support for improved business engagement.

5.59 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked for opinions on why there were negative views from some respondents on:

- Representing issues of concern to HE to WAG
- Support for leadership governance and management
- Support for enhancement of research
- Support for enhancement of learning and teaching
- Support for links with business and the community

#### **Representing issues of concern to HE to WAG**

5.60 The main theme seemed to be that HEFCW has no visible power to represent the sector to WAG because WAG is the paymaster.

#### **Support for leadership governance and management**

5.61 The theme seems to be that HEFCW is not seen to be committed to addressing this.

#### **Support for enhancement of research**

5.62 The number of comments here was relatively small. Some respondents questioned whether this was HEFCW's role. Some universities focus more on teaching and had no comment to make.

5.63 There were several comments from younger universities at HEFCW's lack of support for research in these institutions.

#### **Support for enhancement of learning and teaching**

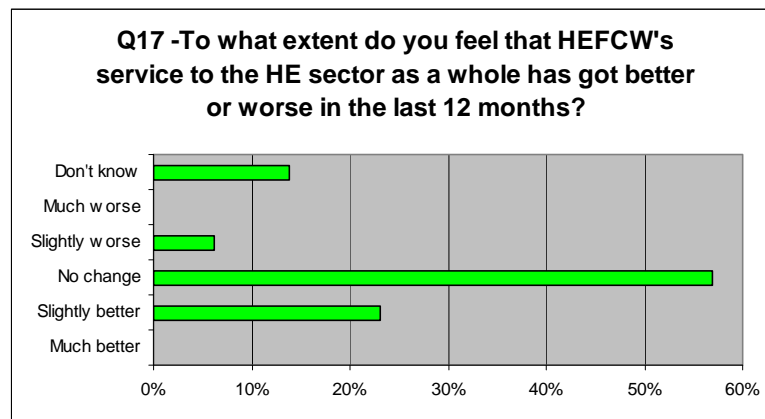
5.64 Funding is a key negative issue as well as HEFCW not seen to be meaningfully engaged with the sector.

### Support for links with business and the community

5.65 HEFCW is not seen to have the expertise to assist.

#### Q17. To what extent do you feel the service HEFCW provides to the HE sector as a whole has got better or worse over the last 12 months?

5.66 Almost one quarter (23%) of respondents feel that service to the HE sector as a whole has got slightly better in the last 12 months, but 6% think that it has got slightly worse.

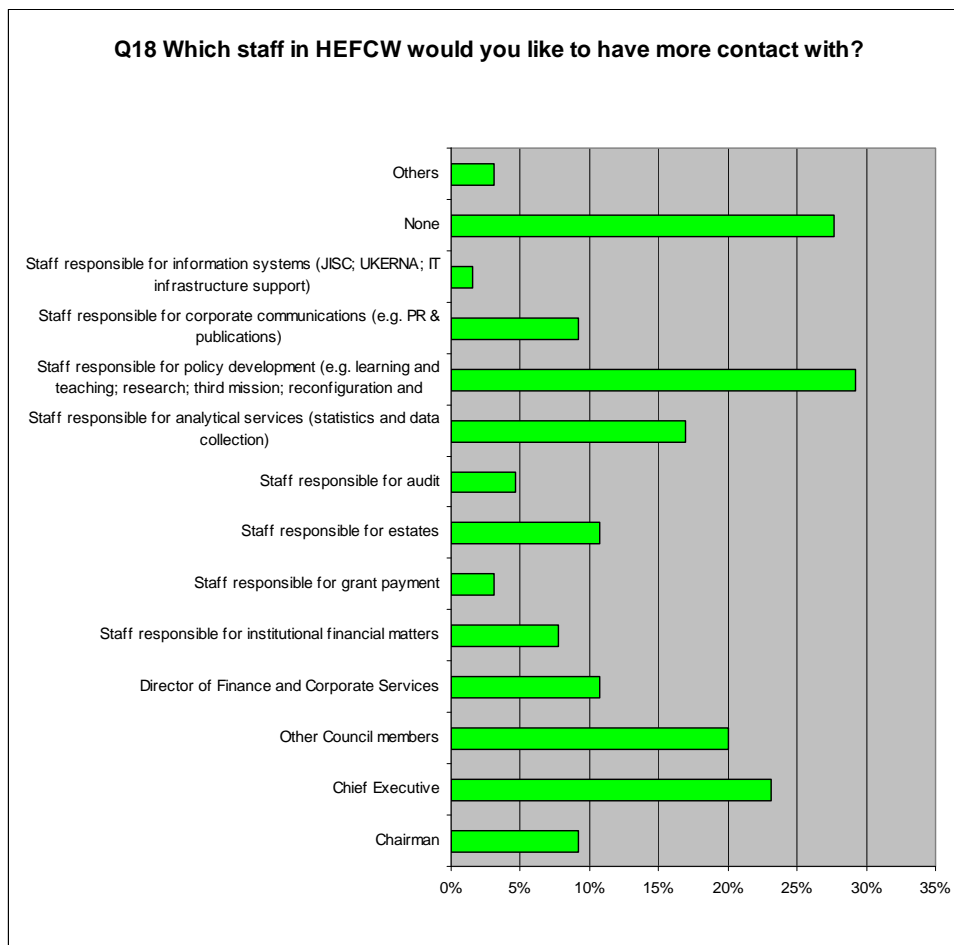


Base 65

## Contact and dealings with HEFCW

### Q18. Which of the following in HEFCW would you like to have more contact with? (PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

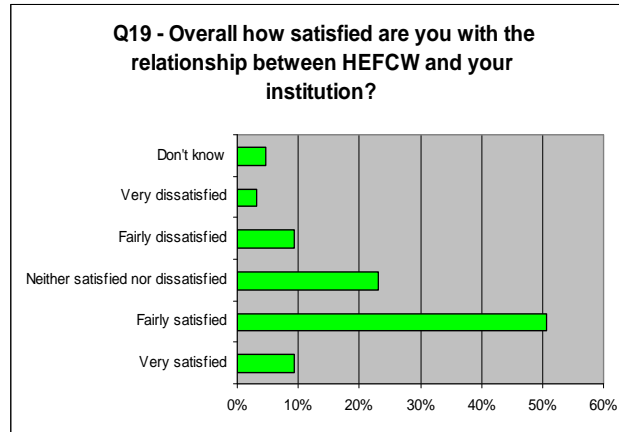
- 5.67 Just over one quarter of respondents are not seeking any more contact with HEFCW staff.
- 5.68 The people wanting more contact with staff responsible for analytical services are biased towards administration and finance.
- 5.69 People wanting more contact with staff responsible for policy development, the Chief Executive, Council members and Chairman are primarily senior staff – Vice Chancellor, Principal, Head of Faculty etc.
- 5.70 The requests for more contact reflect a consistent view expressed by many respondents for engagement by HEFCW on a personal level. HEFCW needs to be engaged with the sector at an emotional level. More personal contact is seen as key to improving trust and understanding.
- 5.71 The formal communications issued by HEFCW are seen to need 'interpretation' that can often only be achieved through personal contact.



Base 65

**Q19. Overall, how satisfied are you with the relationship between your institution and HEFCW?**

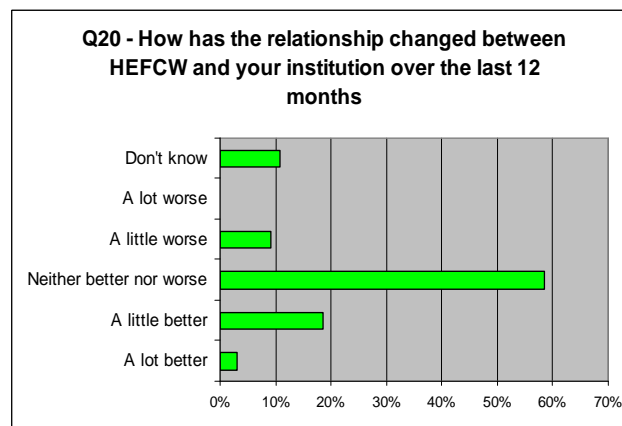
5.72 60% of respondents are fairly or very satisfied with the relationship between their institution and HEFCW. Only a small minority are dissatisfied.



Base 65

**Q20. How has this relationship changed, if at all, over the last 12 months?**

5.73 Just over 1 in 5 respondents (21%) feel that the relationship between HEFCW and their institution has got a little or a lot better in the last 12 months. This reflects similar improvements in service.



Base 65

**What should HEFCW be doing more of to continue to improve relationships?**

- 5.74 The follow up interviews asked what HEFCW should be doing more of to continue to improve relationships.
- 5.75 Many respondents did not have a problem with relationships so comments were generally restricted to “carry on as you are”.
- 5.76 The comments from those looking for improvements tended to suggest more personal contact as part of the solution:

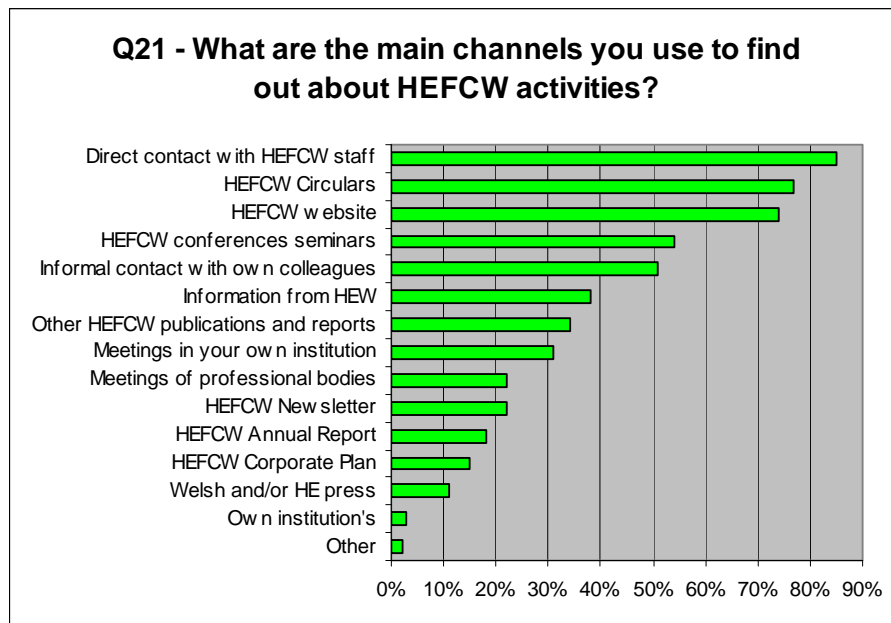
## Communications

**Q21. What are the main channels you currently use to find out about HEFCW's activities? (Please tick all that apply)**

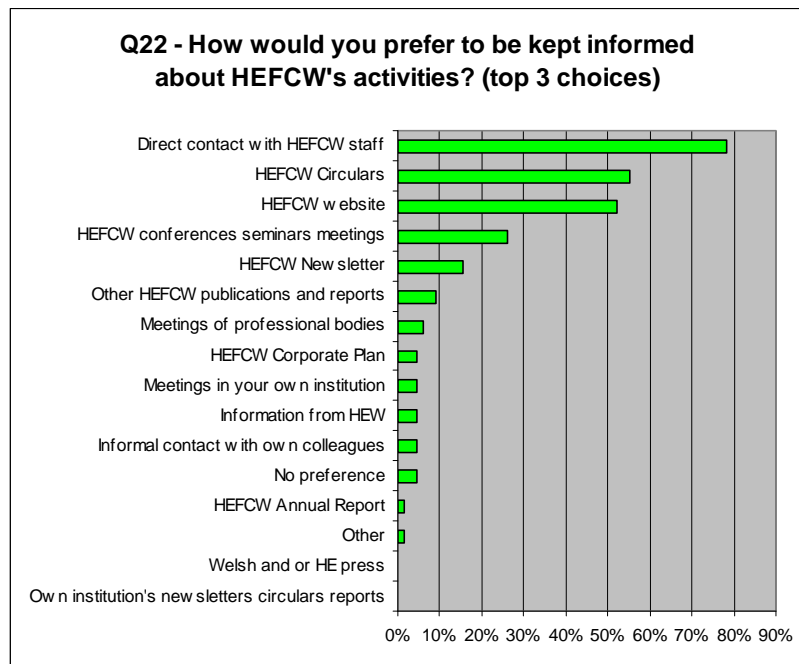
**Q22. How would you prefer to be kept informed about HEFCW's activities? (Please select up to three preferred options)**

5.77 The top 4 communications channels used by respondents are also the top 4 channels they prefer.

5.78 The Newsletter is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> as a preferred communication channel, much higher than its position in the usage table. This suggests that more emphasis should be given to the Newsletter.



Base 65



Base 65

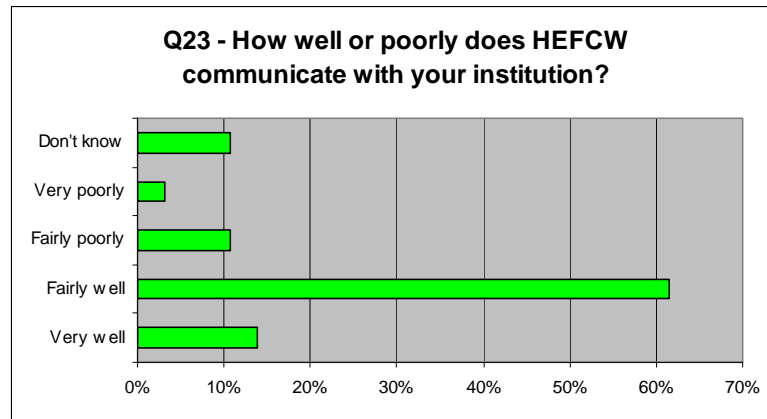
### Reasons why direct contact is preferred

5.79 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked why direct contact with HEFCW staff was so important. Was it a need for more information? Did it reflect a lack of information available through other routes? Did it reflect the need for more accessible information through other routes?

- Personal contact improves understanding and builds trust
- HEFCW's written communications are seen to be unduly long and lack clarity
- New developments are not always brought directly to the appropriate people's attention

### Q23. Overall, how well or poorly does HEFCW communicate with your institution?

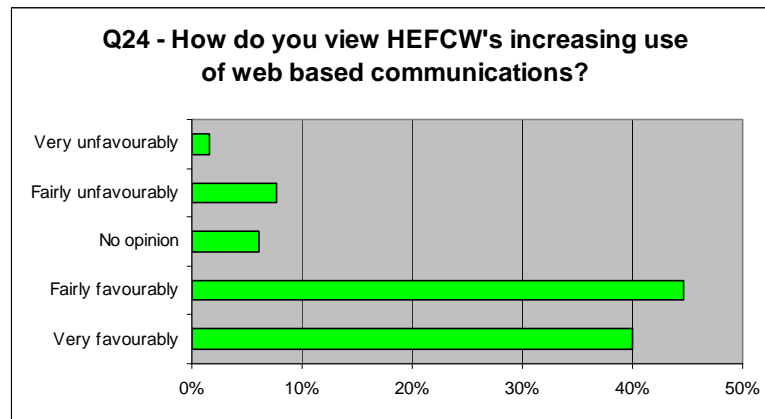
5.80 Three quarters (76%) of respondents feel that HEFCW communicates fairly or very well with their institution.



Base 65

**Q24. HEFCW is moving increasingly to the use of web-based and electronic communications. How do you view this?**

5.81 85% of respondents view HEFCW's increasing use of web-based communications as fairly or very favourable.



Base 65

**Q25. How useful do you personally find the following?**

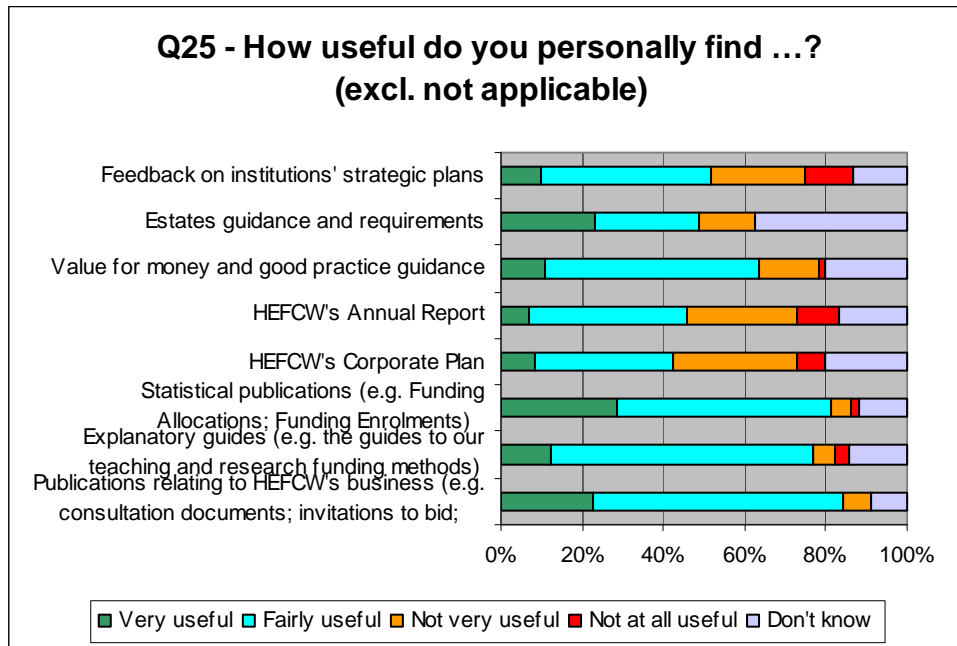
5.82 Statistical publications, explanatory guides and publications relating to HEFCW's business are found very or fairly useful by the vast majority of respondents.

5.83 Value for money and good practice guidance is seen as useful by two thirds of respondents, although there is a small minority (17%) that do not see this as useful.

5.84 Whilst over 40% of respondents find HEFCW's Annual Report or Corporate Plan very or fairly useful, a significant minority (approaching 40%) do not.

5.85 'Feedback on institutions' strategic plans' is seen as very or fairly useful by 52% of respondents but 35% see this as not very or not at all useful.

5.86 The sample base varies from 43 to 58 because we have excluded respondents that identified a specific element as not applicable.



Base 43 – 58 (excludes not applicable)

5.87 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked:

- What improvements people would like to see in HEFCW's Corporate Plan and Annual Report
- What would sort of feedback on institutions strategic plans and financial forecasts would be more useful

### Annual Report and Corporate Plan

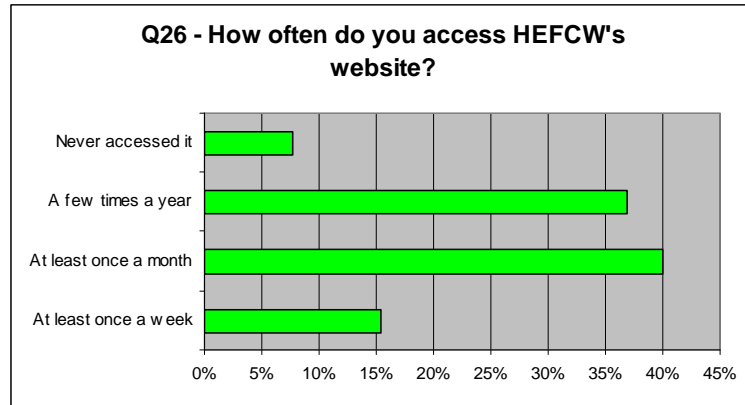
5.88 A large number of respondents to the telephone interviews stated that they either don't see these documents, don't read them or just give a cursory glance.

### **Institutions strategic plans and financial forecasts**

- 5.89 Respondents want constructive feedback at a strategic level not the focus on detail which they perceive to be the case.
- 5.90 Institutions also prefer to have face-to-face discussion not just written responses.

**Q26. How often do you access HEFCW's website (www.hefcw.ac.uk)?**

5.91 Website access is relatively infrequent. This reinforces comments that the website is not as useful as people would like it to be.

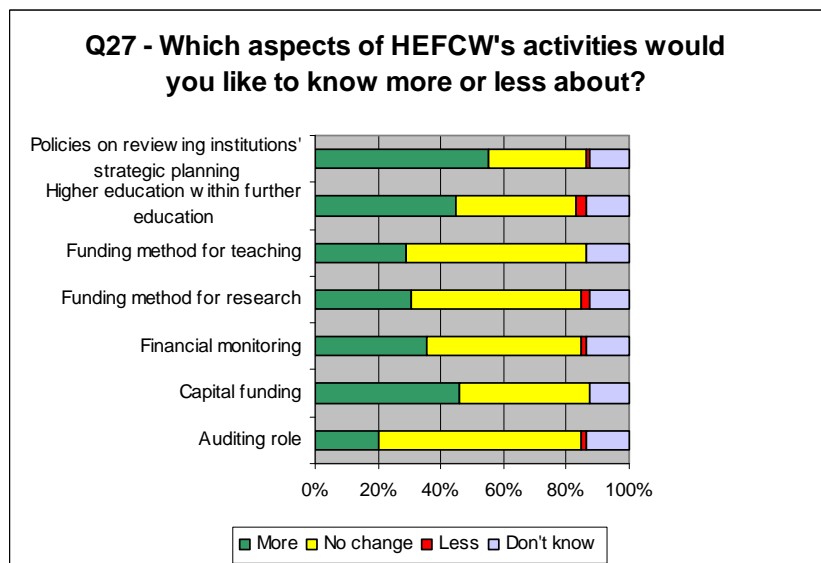


Base 65

**Q27. Which aspects of HEFCW's activities, if any, would you like to know more or less about?**

5.92 A significant proportion of respondents would like to know more about a wide range of HEFCW's activities. Policies on reviewing institutions strategic planning heads the list, followed by HE within FE and Capital funding.

5.93 In other areas, the proportion of respondents asking for no change is higher than those asking for more information. However, there is still a substantial proportion of respondents asking for more information.



Base 65

5.94 In the follow up telephone interviews we explored what more information people wanted on:

- Policies on reviewing institutions strategic planning
- Funding activities and financial monitoring
- Higher Education within Further Education

#### **Policies on reviewing institutions strategic planning**

5.95 The main request is for a better understanding of what HEFCW is looking for in plans and the review criteria.

#### **Funding activities and financial monitoring**

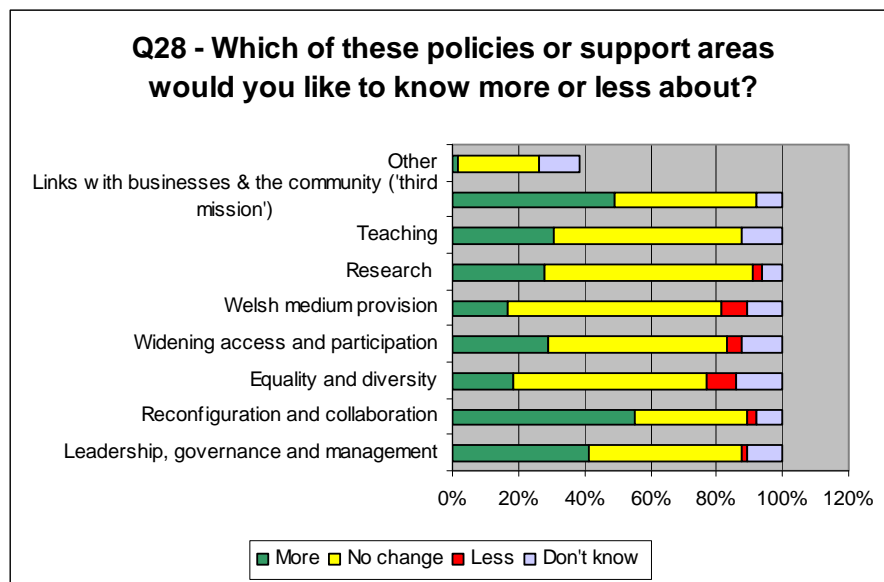
5.96 There is no particular theme to the comments.

#### **Higher Education within Further Education**

5.97 This seems to be an area where policies are unclear or still in development, hence the request for more information.

**Q28. HEFCW develops policies on, and provides support in, a range of areas. Which of the following would you like to know more or less about?**

- 5.98 A high proportion of respondents would like to know more about 'reconfiguration and collaboration' (55%), 'links with businesses and the community' (49%) and 'leadership governance and management' (42%).
- 5.99 At a lower level, but still representing a significant proportion of respondents, more information is required on 'teaching' (31%), 'research' (28%) and 'widening access and participation' (29%).
- 5.100 Less than 20% of respondents want more information on 'Welsh medium provision' and 'equality and diversity'.



Base 65

- 5.101 In the follow up telephone interviews we explored what more information HEFCW could provide on:

- Leadership, governance and management
- Reconfiguration and collaboration
- Links with business and the community

### **Leadership, governance and management**

5.102 A number of institutions do not see this area as HEFCW's role or see other agencies as better able to do this.

### **Reconfiguration and collaboration**

5.103 The institutions do not seem clear on the policy and more so since the recent change of Minister.

### **Links with business and the community**

5.104 A number of institutions mentioned that HEFCW does not have the industry experience and it should not be their role.

5.105 Institutions seem to be looking for information on industry requirements, better links with WAG industry departments and examples of best practice.

**Q29. Taking into account all the areas covered in the survey, in your view what should be HEFCW's key areas for improvement over the next three years?**

5.106 This was an open question to which 33 responses were received. Some general themes emerged

A potential advocacy role for HEFCW.

*"Representation of the HE community against a WAG unable to acknowledge and therefore respond to a funding gap".*

*"Remaining more independent of WAG".*

*"Leading change rather than responding to political whim".*

*"Fulfil a clearer role in promoting Welsh EE which is undersold compared to English and Scottish HE".*

Reduce micro management.

*"Less micro-management".*

*"Less micro management of small pots of funding".*

Improve electronic communications

*"More up to date website"*

*"More frequent updates and news of what is going on"*

Funding and Strategy

*"Proper development of a capital investment funding stream".*

*"Setting more transparent objectives for the sector and the implications for individual institutions".*

*"Alignment of strategic and other plans in terms of timing".*

*"Need for HEFCW to take a more strategic approach, with less reliance on formula funding methodologies".*

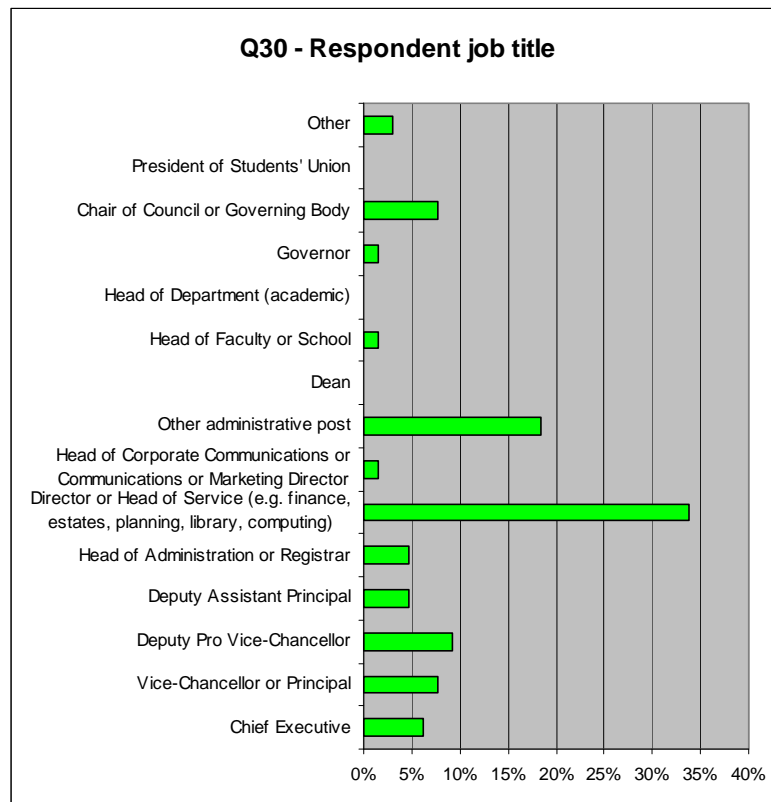
5.107 A number of respondents in Q29 wanted HEFCW to adopt a greater advocacy role for the sector. In the follow up telephone interviews we asked “What could HEFCW do that would be useful given that HEFCW is an Assembly Sponsored Body”?

5.108 Most institutions recognize that HEFCW is in a difficult position when it comes to being an advocate for the sector. However, they perceive the English, and to an extent the Scottish, funding bodies as doing a better job in representing the sector. The low profile of HEFCW is an issue.

5.109 There is a view that more could be achieved if HEFCW and the sector worked more closely together.

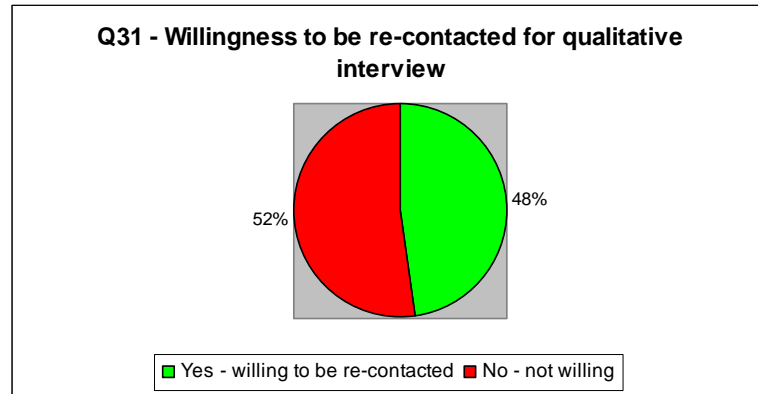
**Q30. What post do you currently hold in your institution? (Please tick one only. If you hold more than one post, please tick the option which indicates your main post.)**

5.110 The table below shows the distribution of respondents by job title.



Base 65

**Q31. Would you be willing to be re-contacted by Strategic Marketing as part of this exercise? We will arrange a suitable time for you to be interviewed by telephone.**



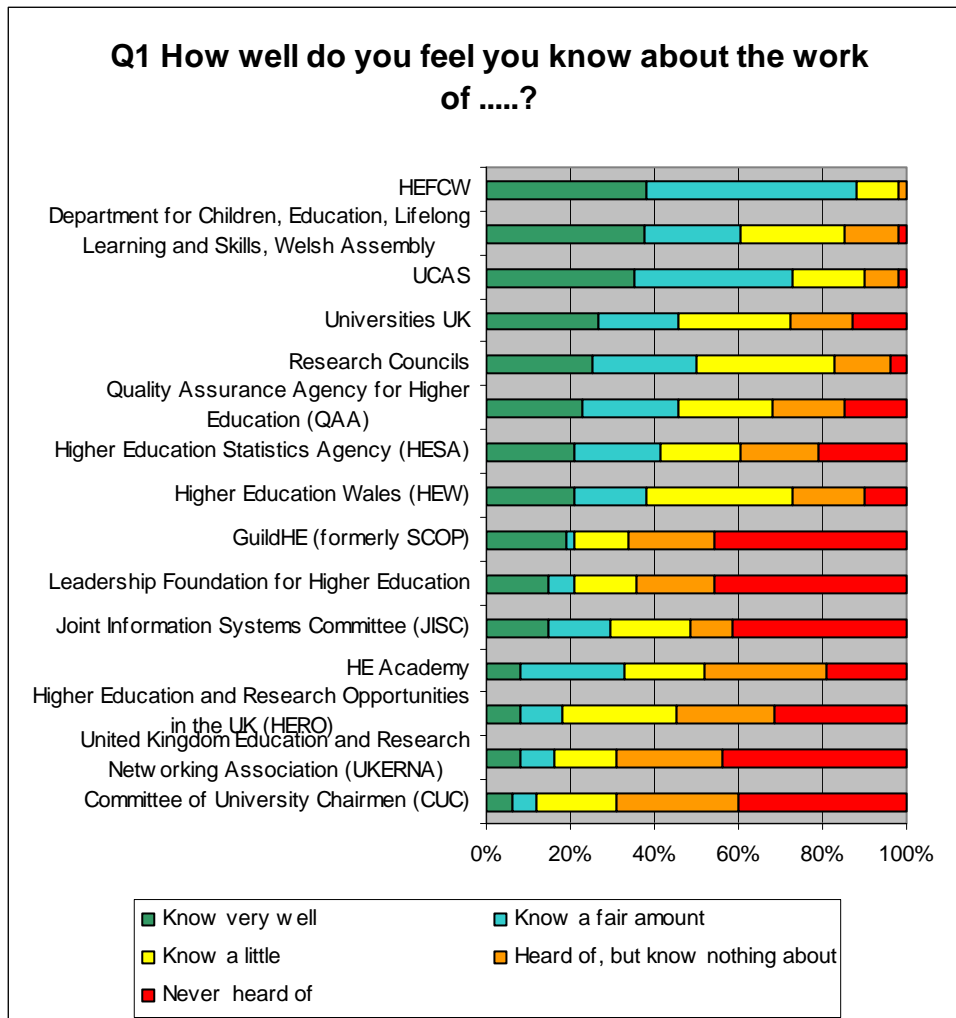
Base 65

## 6. Partners Survey

### Awareness of HEFCW and other bodies associated with higher education.

**Q1. How well do you feel you know about the work of HEFCW and about the work of other bodies listed below which are also associated with higher education?**

- 6.1 In the chart below organisations are ranked in descending order of 'know very well'.
- 6.2 The organisations respondents know most about are HEFCW, DCELLS and UCAS.

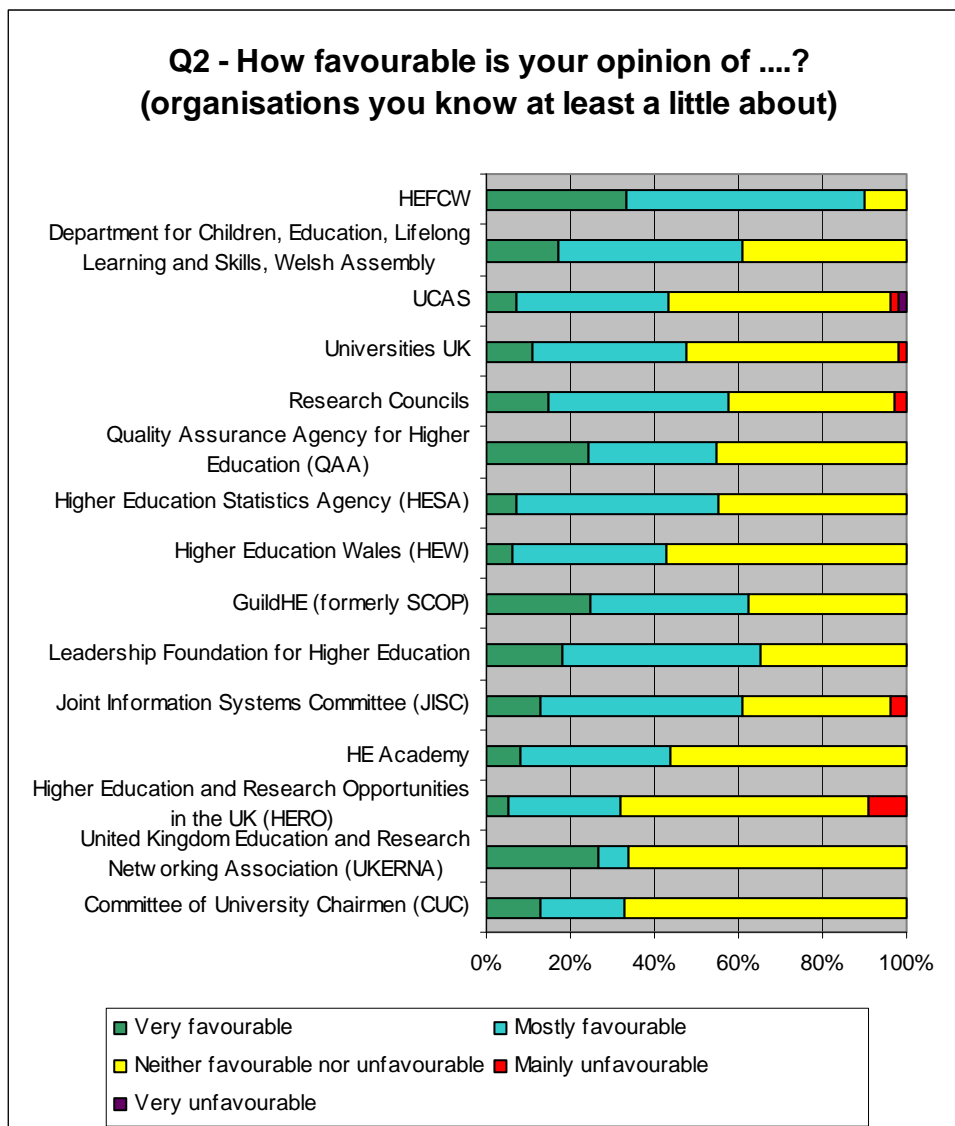


Base 48

## Overall opinion of HEFCW and other bodies associated with higher education.

**Q2. For those organisations that you know at least a little about, please indicate how favourable your overall opinion or impression of each is.**

- 6.3 Respondents were asked for their opinion on those institutions that they knew at least 'a little about'. The base sample therefore varies by organisation (from 16 to 43) with the largest sample at the top of the chart. The results for organisations are presented in the same order as Q1.
- 6.4 HEFCW has the most favourable rating with 89% of respondents rating HEFCW as very or mostly favourable.

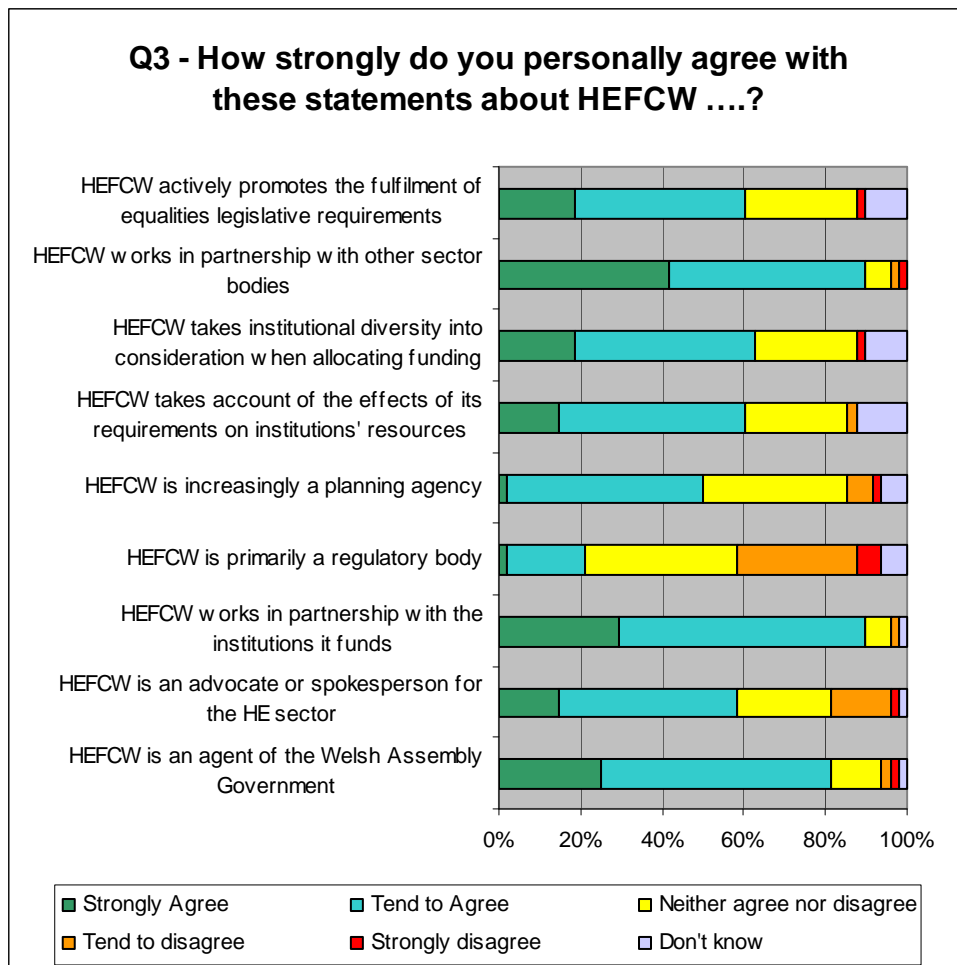


Base 16- 43 (excludes no nothing about and never heard of)

## Perceptions of HEFCW

### Q3. Thinking about HEFCW's current role, how strongly do you personally agree with each of the following statements?

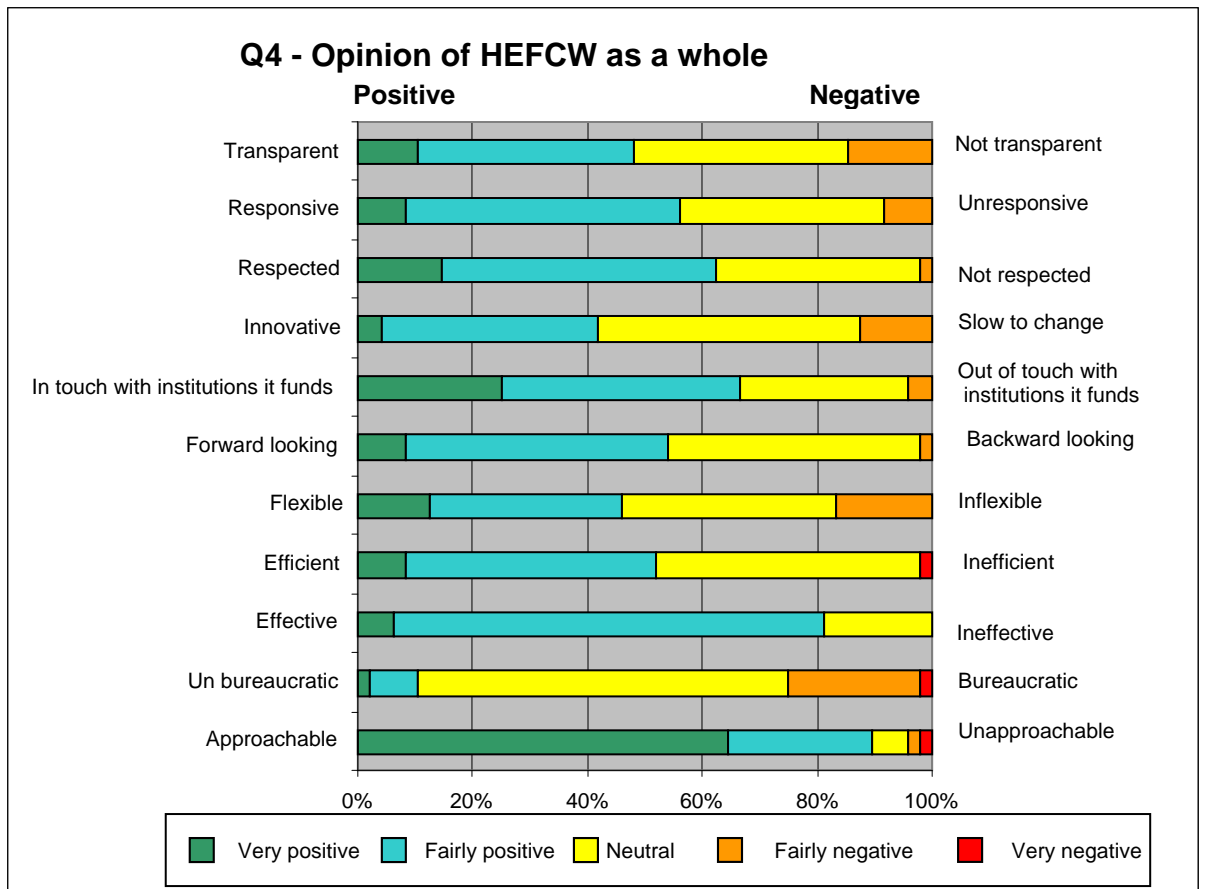
- 6.5 In line with the view of institutions, just over 80% of respondents see HEFCW as an agent of the Welsh Assembly Government with just fewer than 60% seeing HEFCW as an advocate or spokesperson for the HE sector.
- 6.6 Opinion is divided on whether HEFCW is primarily a regulatory body. 21% of respondents agree that HEFCW is primarily a regulatory body whereas 35% disagree and almost 40% are undecided.
- 6.7 There is a strong view that HEFCW works in partnership with institutions and other sector bodies.
- 6.8 There are relatively high proportions of 'no opinion' and 'don't know' for some statements.



Base 48

**Q4. Here are some phrases or adjectives which may or may not describe HEFCW. Thinking of HEFCW as a whole, on the scale below please select the circle that comes closest to your opinion.**

- 6.9 The pattern of responses is very similar to that for institutions.
- 6.10 For most of the descriptions of HEFCW the positive views outweigh the negative. In particular HEFCW is seen as approachable and effective.
- 6.11 There is a very high proportion of neutral views, particularly on the issue of bureaucracy.

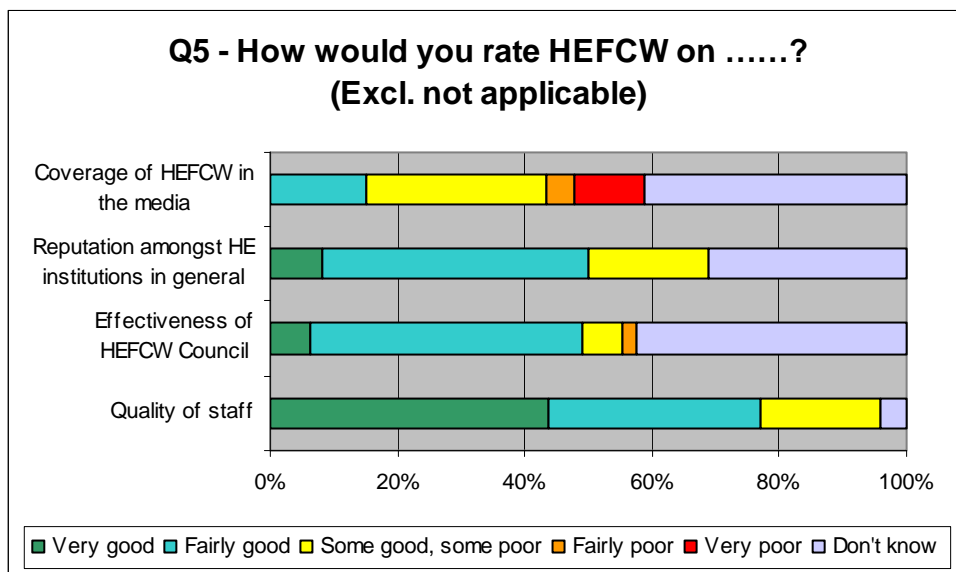


Base 48

- 6.12 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked further questions about the perceptions of bureaucracy held by 1 in 4 Partners.
- 6.13 Partners are generally less critical of the bureaucracy than institutions; they tend to see this as a function of working with Government.

**Q5. From your knowledge and experience of HEFCW, how would you rate each of the following?**

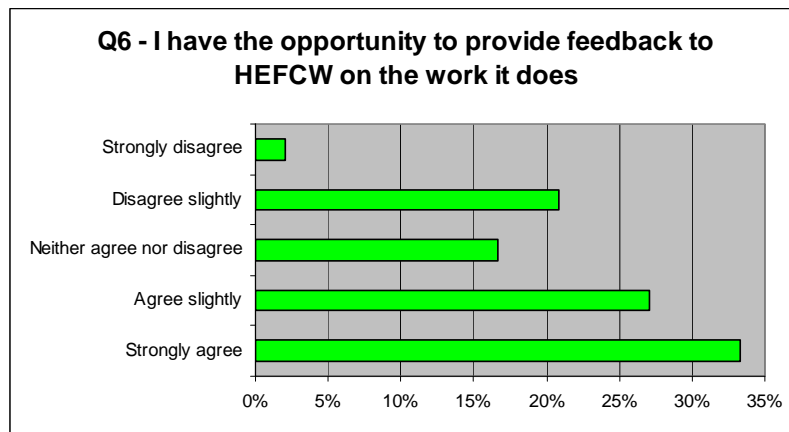
- 6.14 The pattern of responses is similar to that of institutions but tend to be more positive.
- 6.15 Three quarters of respondents rate the quality of HEFCW staff as very or fairly good.
- 6.16 Coverage in the media is a poor area – 15% of respondents see coverage as fairly good, but another 15% see coverage as very or fairly poor.
- 6.17 There are high proportions of 'don't know'.



Base 46- 48 (excludes not applicable)

**Q6 Based on my experience, I have the opportunity to provide feedback to HEFCW on the work it does.**

6.18 60% of respondents agree strongly or slightly that they have the opportunity to provide feedback to HEFCW on its work. This is the same proportion as institutions but there are a greater proportion of 'strongly agree' respondents.



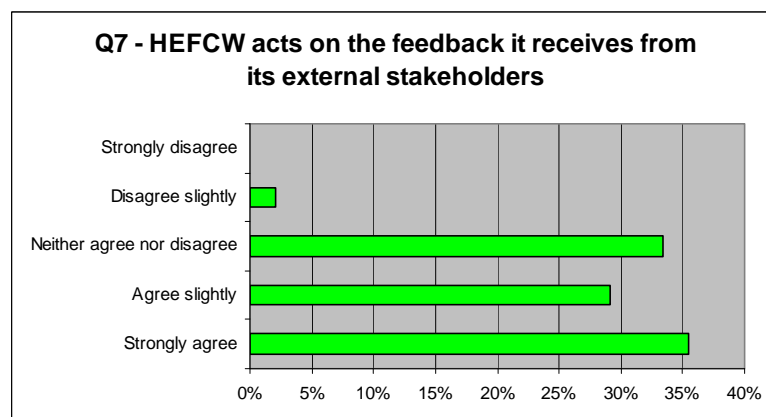
Base 48

6.19 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked why 1 in 5 Partners felt that they did not have the opportunity to provide feedback to HEFCW on the work it does.

6.20 None of the Partners that we interviewed had experienced this issue. All had regular face-to-face meetings and also felt able to 'pick up the phone' and talk to HEFCW.

**Q7. Based on my experience, I feel HEFCW acts (or will act) on the feedback it receives from its external stakeholders and partners.**

6.21 64% of respondents agree slightly or strongly that HEFCW acts or will act on the feedback it receives from stakeholders and partners. There are almost none that disagree.

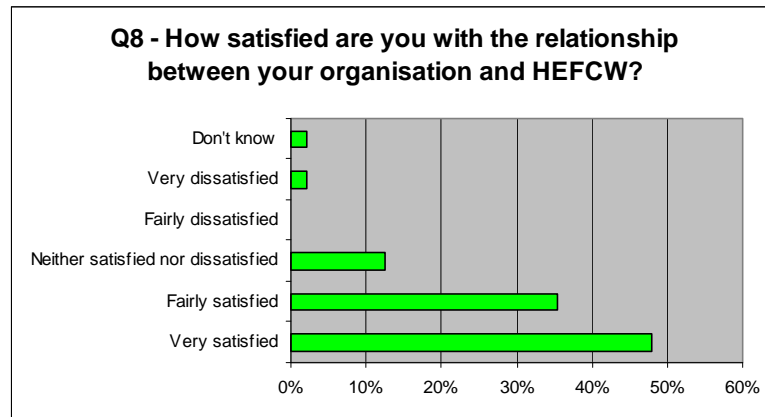


Base 48

## Contact and dealings with HEFCW

### Q8. Overall, how satisfied are you with the relationship between your organisation and HEFCW?

6.22 83% of respondents are fairly or very satisfied with the relationship between their organization and HEFCW. Only a very small minority are dissatisfied.

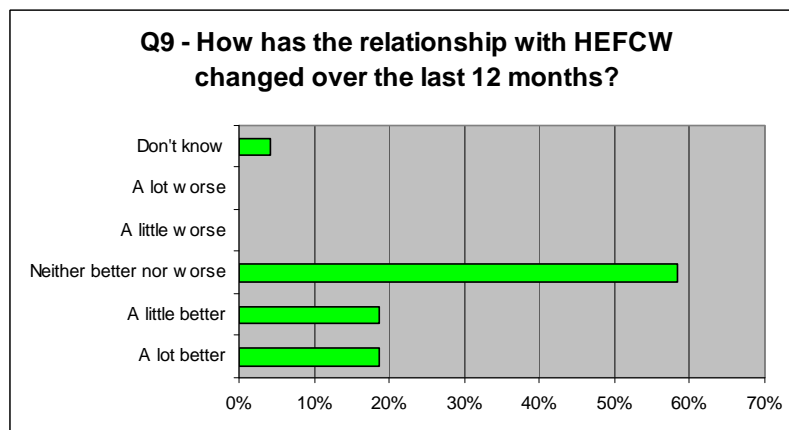


Base 48

### Q9. How has this relationship changed, if at all, over the last 12 months?

6.23 More than 1 in 3 respondents (37%) feel that the relationship between their organisation and HEFCW has got a little or a lot better over the last 12 months. This is a stronger improvement than felt by institutions.

6.24 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked what HEFCW has been doing that has led to an improvement in relationships in the last 12 months and what should HEFCW be doing more of to continue to improve. The key themes from Partners that put forward views were about engaging more with Partners and being clear about roles and what needs doing.



Base 48

6.25 The majority of respondents had not seen a change in the relationship, but this was not necessarily a negative comment.

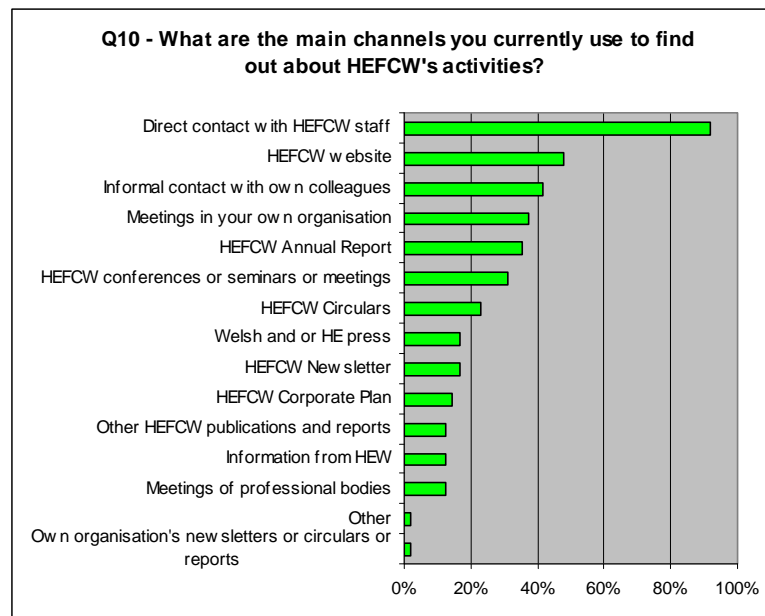
## Communications

**Q10. What are the main channels you currently use to find out about HEFCW's activities? (Please tick all that apply)**

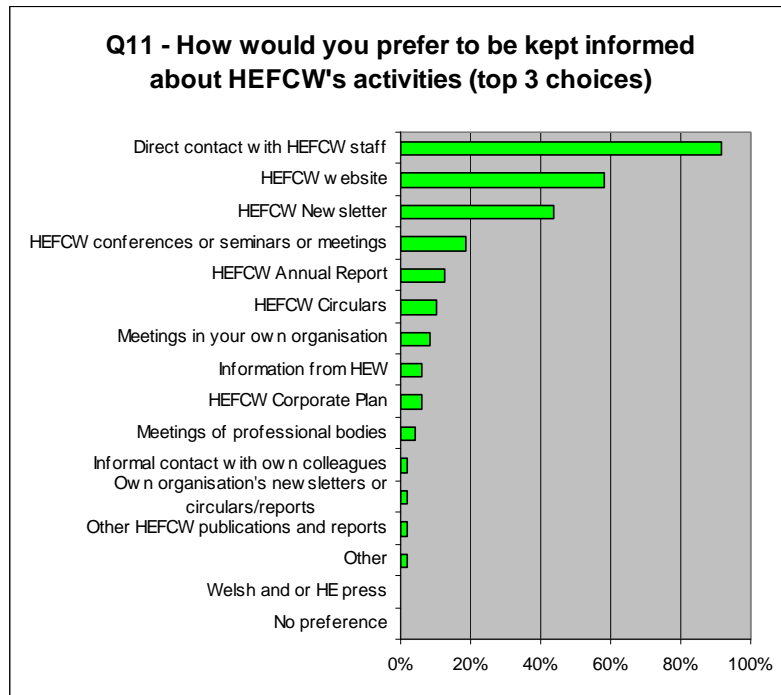
**Q11. How would you prefer to be kept informed about HEFCW's activities? (Please select up to three preferred options)**

6.26 The top two communications channels used by respondents are the top two channels they prefer.

6.27 The Newsletter is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> as a preferred communication channel whereas it is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in channels currently used. This suggests that more emphasis should be given to the Newsletter.



Base 48

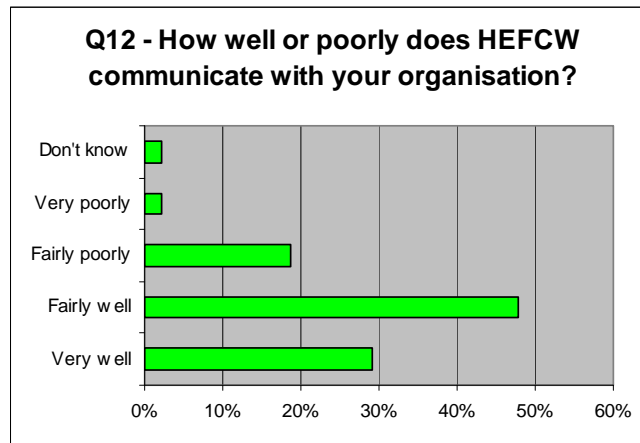


Base 48

- 6.28 In the follow up telephone interviews we asked why direct contact with staff is peoples preferred means of keeping informed of HEFCW's activities.
- 6.29 The key message here is that relationships are critical and that the Partners need to be sure that they understand the formal communications.
- 6.30 We also asked what changes to the website and the Newsletters people would like to see.
- 6.31 Most respondents did not feel able to comment because they did not use the website or had seen the Newsletter.

**Q12 Overall, how well or poorly does HEFCW communicate with your organization**

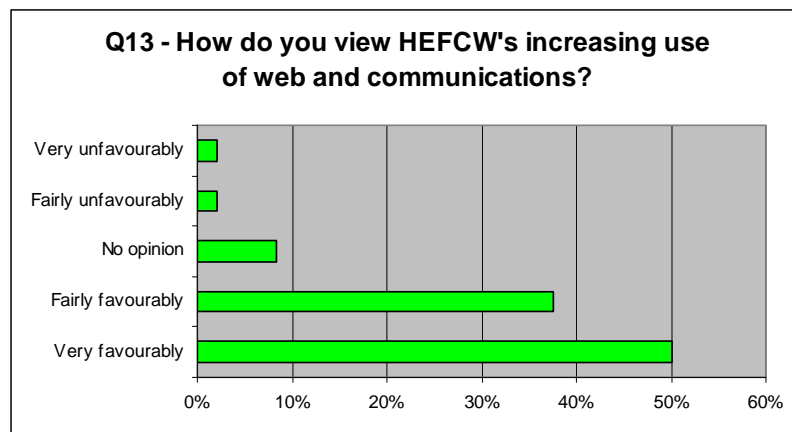
- 6.32 Three quarters (77%) of respondents feel that HEFCW communicates fairly or very well with their institution.



Base 48

**Q13. HEFCW is moving increasingly to the use of web-based and electronic communications. How do you view this?**

6.33 88% of respondents view HEFCW's increasing use of web-based communications as fairly or very favourable. This is even more positive than institutions.



Base 48

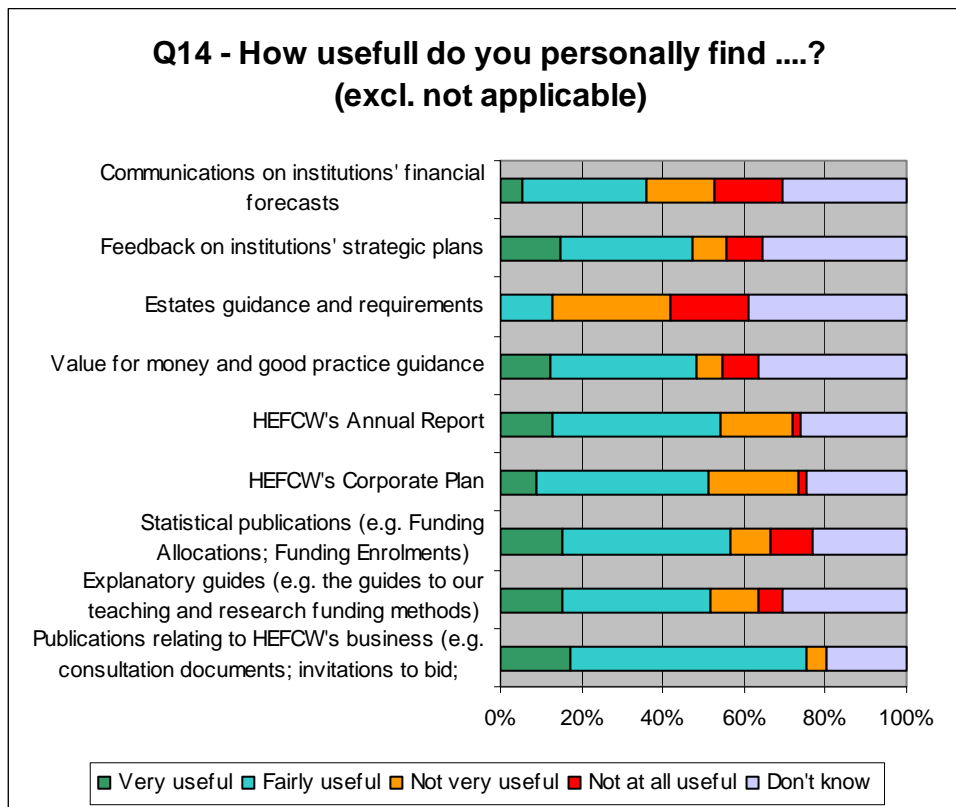
**Q14. How useful do you personally find the following?**

6.34 The samples for each question area exclude those respondents that ticked 'not applicable' to them. The sample size varies as a result from 31 to 46. There are also large numbers of 'don't knows' ranging between 20% and 40% of the sample.

6.35 Taking the above issues into consideration, statistical publications, explanatory guides, value for money and good practice guidance and publications relating to HEFCW's business are considered to be very or fairly useful by a high proportion of respondents.

6.36 HEFCW's Annual Report, Corporate Plan and communications on institutions financial forecasts attract a significant proportion of negative comments (20-25%).

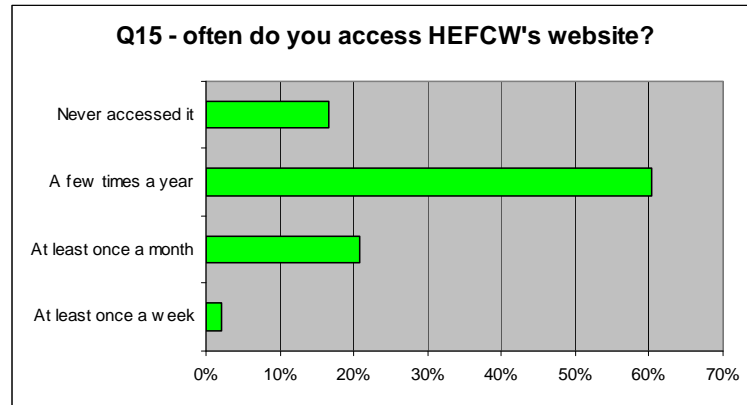
6.37 The majority of respondents find the Estates guidance and requirements publications not very or not at all useful. This probably reflects the specialist audience for these publications.



Base: 36 -46 (excludes not applicable)

**Q15. How often do you access HEFCW's website ([www.hefcw.ac.uk](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk))?**

6.38 60% of Partners access HEFCW's website only a few times a year.



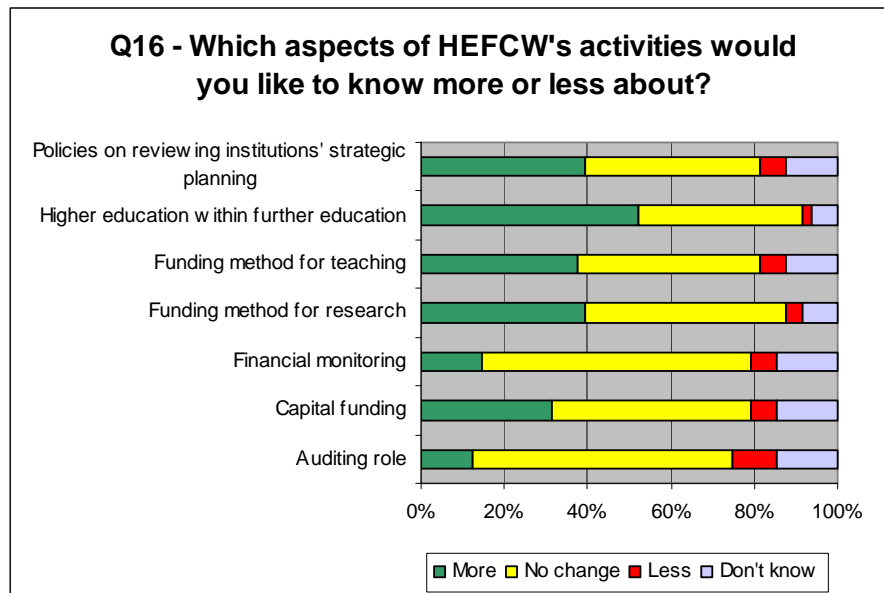
Base 48

**Q16. Which aspects of HEFCW's activities, if any, would you like to know more or less about?**

6.39 There are several areas where a large proportion of respondents would like to know more about HEFCW's activities:

- HE within FE
- Policies on reviewing institutions strategic plans
- Funding methods for teaching
- Funding method for research

6.40 There are equal (or more) respondents that do not want any more information



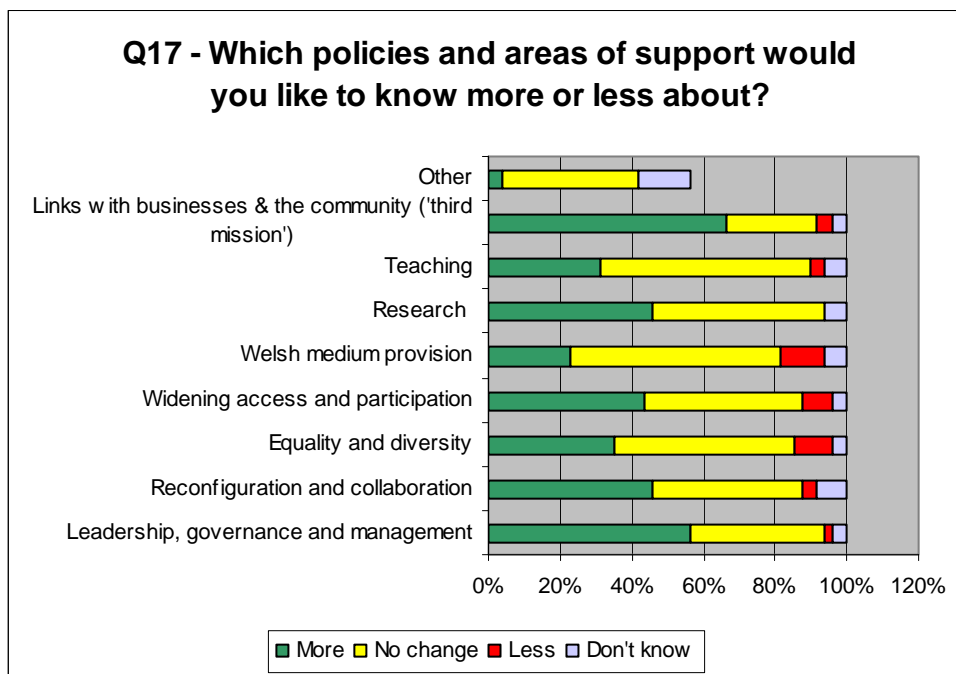
Base 48

**Q17. HEFCW develops policies on, and provides support in, a range of areas. Which of the following would you like to know more or less about?**

6.41 A high proportion of respondents would like to know more about 'links with business and the community' (67%) and 'leadership governance and management' (56%).

6.42 Other areas with a relatively high proportion of respondents wanting to know more are:

- Research
- Widening access and participation
- Equality and diversity
- Reconfiguration and collaboration



Base 48

**Q18 Taking into account all the areas covered in the survey, in your view what should be HEFCW's key areas for improvement over the next three years?**

6.43 This was an open question and there were 25 responses. Themes to emerge were:

- Closer working with Sector Skills Councils.
- Continued review meetings as highlighted in the SSA.
- More meaningful partnership working with the third sector/industry organisations.
- Further integration with WAG on 3rd Mission activities.
- Communicating the role of HEFCW within the overall UK context.
- More direct communications e.g. via email bulletins with success stories, case studies so partners understand their role and achievements.