

11 August 2010

Kelly Hurley
Child Poverty Unit
Welsh Assembly Government
Rhyd-y-car
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Dear Ms Hurley

Consultation on the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales.

Background

The context of our response is that, in 2009, HEFCW signed up to the Joint Agreement on Child Poverty: the precursor to the Children and Families (Wales) Measure. In May 2010 we contributed to the consultation on the Proposed Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure which we attach for your information. It outlines a number of ways in which the policies and practices of HEFCW and the higher education (HE) sector contribute to reducing inequalities in educational attainment and helping young people participate effectively in education and training: the broad aims of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure and relevant to the Child Poverty Strategy Consultation.

Our Corporate Plan 2010-11 to 2012-13 defines our widening access strategic objective as to ensure '*equity, opportunity and success in higher education*'. Therefore, our widening access developments will provide the most appropriate mechanism for supporting the Assembly Government's Child Poverty strategic intentions.

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Turning to the Child Poverty Strategy Consultation, we recognise the centrality of the education strand in delivering improvements in children's circumstances and we stand ready to work collaboratively with Assembly Government officials and other education providers to contribute to meeting its strategic objectives. In shaping our response below, we recognise that pre-HE education features more prominently in the Strategy, given the target age group, therefore, our submission is of a more general nature than other stakeholders might wish to make.

In relation to the key section on higher education (page 8), it is worth noting that some aspects of our widening access policy have been revised, to take account of *For our Future*

expectations to renew our approach to widening access: *For our Future* is the Assembly Government's strategy for higher education (Nov 2009). Therefore, it would be helpful to reflect these developments in the final Strategy. A significant development is that the primary widening access measure now is based on engagement with Communities First areas. Our aim is to improve access and progression to higher education for people of all ages in Communities First areas where such opportunities are low, including the Heads of the Valleys. This target challenges the higher education sector to effect:

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. '

Our focus on Communities First areas contributes to, and aligns strongly with, the support the Assembly Government provides for these communities through this and other strategies and initiatives. We agree with the Child Poverty Strategy's (page 63, section 11.3) identification of geographical concentrations of poverty in terms of resource and aspiration in areas of Wales. Our widening access developments also recognise that these factors create barriers to personal, social and economic development. To this end, many areas in the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI), to which the Strategy refers (page 8, bullet 6) will also benefit from our widening access Communities First focus.

The HE widening access initiative, Reaching Wider, will, from 2011/12, be restructured into three, rather than four, regional Partnerships. From 2010/11 the Partnerships' progress will be measured against their contribution to the Communities First target outlined above, together with the learner completion target noted in the Strategy (page 8, bullet four). These targets supersede and will incorporate the Partnerships' previous focus on work with minority ethnic groups, with disabilities and those accessing Welsh medium provision (currently referenced in bullet six of the Strategy's HE section).

Furthermore, we recognise that higher education is well-placed to contribute to several other aspects of the Child Poverty Strategy. Our May 2010 Children and Young Persons consultation response draws attention to the fact that, unlike other devolved administrations of the UK, all Welsh higher education institutions have all gained the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education. The quality mark recognises institutional commitment to supporting looked after children and care leavers to and through higher education.

In relation to partnership working, the focus of Chapter 10 of the Strategy, we agree with the statements that partnership working and local delivery are key requirements for achieving cultural change in areas of multiple-deprivation and to add value to existing services. We are currently working with the sector to develop regional strategies to encourage a greater focus on regional planning and delivery (see circular W10/16HE available at: www.hefcw.uk/publications/circulars). Our renewed approach to widening access will be delivered within a context of greater multi-agency, cross-sector regional working to better identify and respond to local need, improving flexible learning opportunities and clearer progression routes which are more suited to the lives and livelihoods of adults, families, young people and employers. Our regional widening access work, including Reaching Wider

Partnership activity, will contribute to providing learning opportunities for parents and families who wish to gain new skills or to upskill to improve their employment prospects:

Turning to section 9.6 (page 49), we recognise the need to support and enable refugees to rebuild their lives and make a full contribution to society. In March 2010 we published a circular on widening access to higher education for refugees and asylum seekers. The circular explored some of the barriers faced in accessing higher-level study together with examples of effective practice in providing refugee and asylum seeker support in higher education, see circular W10/13HE on the HEFCW website:

www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/circulars/circulars.

Finally, in response to section 9.7 (page 50), our Reaching Wider Partnerships in the West and Mid and South West areas are working with gypsy and traveller children as part of their minority ethnic community engagement with work. The most recent initiative has been through film, theatre and television workshops for the Haverfordwest-based Gypsy and Travellers community. We recognise that these communities are traditionally un-represented in higher education and our work aims to challenge some of the misconceptions about higher education and improve learning and integration opportunities.

If you would like any further information about our widening access policy and practices with contribute to the Child Poverty Strategy, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Philip Gummatt
Chief Executive