

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

Reference:W03/04HE

Date:

Response By:

Further Information: Teresa Cooper 029 2068 2304

WORK EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY PLANS

This circular letter invites institutions to submit updated Work Experience and Employability Plans (WEEPS) to the Council and should be read in conjunction with the consultation document - **Future Development of the Higher Education Economic Development (HEED) Fund (Circular W03/03HE)**.

The Council first invited institutions to submit WEEPS in summer 2000, to cover the period from 2000/01 to at least 2002/03 and updated plans were requested in summer 2001 (**Circular W01/60HE refers**). This letter calls for a second (and final) update on the progress your institution has made in implementing its existing WEEP, together with a summary of your future intentions in this area.

To assist you in preparing the requested WEEP update we have attached to this letter copies of:

- ◆ the analysis of the update you provided last year, prepared by Professor Lee Harvey of the Centre for Research into Quality at the University of Central England;
- ◆ Professor Harvey's overview report on all of the WEEPS updates received last year;
- ◆ the consultation document on the future development of the HEED Fund; and
- ◆ a framework for the preparation of WEEPS (as set out in last year's WEEPS update request circular).

In preparing your WEEP, please continue to use the same definitions of work experience and graduate employability as used in the previous two years, and which have been made available to you in previous WEEPS circulars.

Hitherto, HEFCW has been the only UK funding body to request WEEPS and this strategic approach to promoting graduate employability was commended in a UK-wide report entitled *Enhancing Employability, Recognising Diversity*, published by Universities UK (UUK) and the HE Careers Services Unit (CSU) in July 2002. Looking to the future, however, and given the rapid progress that has been made in Wales in developing

strategies and activities to promote employability and work experience, the continuing need for institutions to produce stand-alone WEEPS is open to question (see Professor Harvey's attached WEEPS overview report). At the same time, the Council believes that it is crucial that measures to enhance employability (and meet the needs of employers) are firmly embedded within the institution's approach to both learning and teaching, and economic development. Hence the questions about the best way to handle WEEPS in the future that you will see in the HEED consultation exercise referred to above.

As you will see from the attached circular, the HEED consultation exercise will also address the appropriateness of making the HEED Fund the future vehicle for the provision of funding in support of the successor programme to the current Graduate Wales and Cymru Prosper Wales initiatives, and for funding to enhance the quality of careers services in Wales' HEIs in line with the recommendations of the Careers Services Review Working Group, which submitted recommendations to the Assembly Government in June 2002.

When preparing this year's WEEPS update, you are asked to bear all of the above developments in mind. Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised in this letter more fully, then please contact my colleague, Teresa Cooper, on 029 2068 2304, who will be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely

Phil Gummett

WORK EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY PLAN FRAMEWORK

- ❖ ***Executive Summary.***
- ❖ ***Introductory statement setting out the institution's strategy*** for the promotion and provision of work experience opportunities, and programmes and projects aimed at improving graduate employability, including how the strategy fits into the institution's overriding learning and teaching strategy, the underlying rationale, and the policies which will be employed to deliver the WEEP.
- ❖ ***Key aims and objectives.***
- ❖ ***Progress to date*** giving an account of activity over the previous year, including progress in achieving the targets set out in the strategy. It should provide information on work experience and graduate employability projects and programmes, including expenditure. (Where there are several projects institutions may wish to record much of the detail in annexes).
- ❖ A description of how the institution takes into account the ***views and wishes of business, commerce, the public sector and the professions***, as well as its own undergraduates and graduates, in developing its work experience and graduate employability policies and monitoring their consequent delivery.
- ❖ ***Medium-term strategy for the next three years***, setting out:
 - ❖ the programme to be conducted in the coming academic year;
 - ❖ the key activities proposed over the full period;
 - ❖ the expected outcomes;
 - ❖ the *targets* set
- ❖ ***Description of the systems in place for managing the development, oversight and implementation of the strategy***, including reference to the role of heads of departments/schools and other key staff. The Council will expect to see the role of a senior manager with responsibility for these matters clearly identified.
- ❖ ***Ongoing monitoring and evaluation arrangements.***

**Analysis and overview of Work Experience and
Employability Plans of Welsh higher education
institutions, 2001–02.**

Report by

Lee Harvey

**Centre for Research *into* Quality
University of Central England in Birmingham**

for

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

January 2002

Wales overall

Considerable progress has taken place on the employability agenda in Welsh Higher Education. Since the inception of the Employability Audit in Wales, in what is a relatively short period of time, five noticeable trends have occurred in the sector.

First, there is, in most institutions, a much clearer understanding of employability and appreciation of the array of different work experience and employability skill-development possibilities.

Second, there is a clear shift towards facilitating learning from vacation and term-time part-time work, rather than ignoring it or being actively hostile to such work because it is construed as interfering with (full-time) student academic work.

Third, there is a much clearer notion of the need to embed employability skill development in the curriculum and a general shift away from only providing stand-alone employability modules.

Fourth, although not quite so widespread, is the general encouragement of reflection on learning from work experience.

A fifth trend noticeable in some areas is the critical analysis of the notion of 'employability' away from simple indicators, such as institution-based graduate employment rates, to an evaluation of the employability of the graduate and serious enquiry as to what enhances student employability attributes. Some institutions refer to their 'employability rate', that is, the HESA graduate employment statistic based on first-destination returns (FDR). This is not a direct measure of 'employability'. Students develop 'employability' characteristics not institutions. There is no such thing as the 'employability' of the institution, thus there can be no 'employability rate' of the institution. The employment rate of graduates *might* be indicative of the effectiveness of the employment development opportunities provided by institutions. However, as student employability derives from personal activities and work as well as the academic experience there is no direct correlation between employability development opportunities provided by an institution and the employment of graduates, as some institutions appropriately point out.

Most institutions include elements of the following in their planned activities:

- audit and increase work experience opportunities;
- redevelop curricula to embed employability skill and attitude development in mainstream subject teaching and learning;
- develop central support to increase knowledge of employment opportunities, help provide opportunities and develop students' 'job-getting' skills;
- use of profiling or other means to enable and encourage students to reflect on their work experience or employability attribute development.

Most WEEPs include objectives and most specify targets either as numbers (of people or departments involved in the activity) or completion dates. Sometimes, though, targets are vague and not easily measurable or verifiable. Few institutions provide staging of implementation plans with interim targets. Still fewer prioritise objectives. Sometimes new developments occur that are not targeted and it is important that the WEEP is flexible and able take account of new directions.

Institutions tend to highlight what was achieved and what will be achieved. Most reports give little or no indication of which objectives for last year have been dropped or significantly altered.

There is a much clearer specification in the WEEPs, this year, of the system for managing the development oversight and monitoring of the Plans. In nearly all cases, institutions claim that the WEEP is integrated with their learning and teaching strategies; often the WEEP is a sub-element of the learning and teaching strategy. Usually, steering groups are responsible for implementing or monitoring the WEEP. Often there is crossover membership of the WEEP committee and the learning and teaching strategy group and/or the University strategic management group. In some cases institution-wide bodies, such as Academic Board or the institution Learning and Teaching Committee have responsibility for monitoring WEEPs, although exactly how such bodies achieve this is not always clear.

The general integration of the WEEP with the Learning and Teaching Strategy has meant, in some cases, that details in the Plan about the development of embedded employability attributes in the curriculum are meagre.

Although clear monitoring processes have been identified in most institutions, criteria by which monitors will be making judgments of progress are sometimes vague. It is probably not appropriate that these be detailed in the WEEPs but it is good practice for institutions to specify clear criteria in internal documents relating to monitoring procedures.

Given the rapid progress in the appreciation of employability issues and development of strategies and activities to promote employability and work experience as well as the general trend to fully integrate WEEP with Learning and Teaching strategy is there a continuing need to produce separate WEEPs?