

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

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Strategic Planning Consultation Seminar – Summary Report

Further to our Strategic Planning Consultation Seminar, held on 24 February 2003, I am pleased to enclose a summary report of the views received from the sector in relation to our proposals to revise the annual strategic planning process, in the light of the Welsh Assembly Government's agenda for Higher Education in Wales and our own Corporate Strategy.

We were delighted to see all of the Welsh higher education sector represented at the seminar, and welcomed the high level of participation by those present. We are grateful for the helpful comments that will help us to move forward in developing our strategic planning processes. We will write in May, as usual, with further details of our request for planning information.

Yours sincerely

Philip Gummett

Notes of Strategic Planning Consultation Meeting, 24 March 2003

Present: representatives from all thirteen higher education institutions (see list attached).

- 1 **Purpose:** The consultation meeting had been convened in response to sector feedback regarding the perceived burden of HEFCW reporting requirements and the need to respond effectively to *Reaching Higher*.
- 2 **Background:** Phil Gummatt outlined the way in which the Council had aimed to reduce reporting requirements over the last few years. The particular demands of the reconfiguration and collaboration agenda in terms of strategic planning were recognised. The sector broadly welcomed the Council's attempts to reduce the number of strategies requested and recognised the need for accountability and for sufficient detail to meet Assembly requirements for information. Officers drew attention to the Council's particular need to give assurances to the Welsh Assembly Government regarding financial health and governance.
- 3 **Proposals:** In the future, the Council aimed to streamline, over several years, the reporting process in terms of institutional strategic plans and the various separate reports, strategies and plans which were required to provide information on and accountability for specific initiatives. There would be a focus on the sector-wide *Reaching Higher* targets. It was hoped, subject to this consultation meeting, to introduce amended arrangements for strategic planning this year, as the first step in this process.
- 4 **Integration** was highlighted by participants as being key to effective strategic planning. The sector would ideally like integration/shared thinking between HEIs, HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government. Effective linking of individual planning documents (eg Learning and Teaching strategies) with institutional strategic plans would assist this. The sector welcomed the SHEFC approach in requiring the submission of only one overall strategic plan. In addition, it was suggested that the sector/Council should be more proactive in informing Assembly policy making, particularly in the context of the additional £30m *Reaching Higher* funding proposed for 2005-06. The role of Higher Education Wales was also discussed in this context.
- 5 **Interaction:** The sector would like further engagement between Council members/officers and individual institutions. This would increase knowledge and understanding of institutions and improve feedback mechanisms. There was broad support for the SHEFC model of institutional visits. Sector involvement on Council sub-committees would also improve interaction and mutual understanding.
- 6 **Timing:** The sector would like timescales to fit individual institutions' own planning cycles (and recognition that the Funding Council is not the only source of institutions' income). Some means of addressing differing timescales for the submission of individual plans and strategies would be welcome.
- 7 **Recognising progress.** Some welcomed the idea of reporting progress against individual plans and strategies via one annual statement and there was general support for the HEFCE Annual Operating Statement. The sector noted a desire for more focused feedback from the Council on plans/strategies.
- 8 **Targets:** The sector recognised the need for HEFCW to monitor sector-wide performance against the *Reaching Higher* targets and welcomed the proposal that this monitoring might be aligned with (but not distort) the strategic planning process. It was noted that whilst the sector overall would be expected to work towards all the targets, each individual institution could focus differentially on those relevant to its mission. However, Council officers would need to conduct a 'gap analysis' and work with the sector to ensure overall coverage of the targets.