

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

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Response By: No response required
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INSTITUTIONAL VISITS – OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of the Council's consultation on proposals to implement a programme of institutional visits to facilitate further engagement between Council members and officers and individual institutions.

Circular W04/39HE set out for consultation the Council's proposals, inviting heads of institutions to comment on how we might make the visits as productive as possible. It was proposed that the cycle might involve:

- i) formal meetings to take place at institutions on a 3-4 yearly cycle;
- ii) a process in which institutions would be represented by the Vice Chancellor or Principal and Chair of the governing body, with other senior staff members invited at the discretion of the institution, and the Council represented by two or more Council Members, the Chief Executive and senior Council officers;
- iii) meetings to extend over a half-day period, with an opportunity for the institution to present an outline of the major issues it faces and its intentions and priorities for the coming academic year, and for the Council to raise any additional relevant matters;
- iv) precise details of the visits to be agreed individually with each institution, allowing time for both the Council and the institution to provide advance notification of the principal issues that each would want to raise.

Responses were received from all HEIs in the sector, though only 8 were received by the consultation deadline, and in time to be considered by the Council at its July meeting.

There was a general welcome for the Council's proposals, though one institution reported the view that it would require additional information about the proposed purpose of, and anticipated attendance at, the meetings in order to evaluate whether the proposals were likely to be beneficial. To that end, Council is mindful, as proposed in the consultation paper, that care will need to be taken to agree the programme and the issues to be raised, in advance, and on an individual institutional basis.

There was broad support for the suggested attendance at meetings, as outlined above. In order to maximise attendance by Council Members it was agreed that, where possible, institutional visits will be arranged to coincide with Council meetings that are due to be held at institutions as part of its normal timetable.

Most institutions welcomed the purpose of the visits, as outlined above, noting that visits would afford an opportunity to supplement and improve existing channels of communication between the Council and institutions and to promote a shared understanding of the unique environments and issues faced by individual institutions. A number of suggestions for focusing the content of meetings included detailed discussion of institutional strategic plans, discussion of individual institutional contributions and constraints in relation to the *Reaching Higher* targets, and opportunities to tour institutional facilities and gain an appreciation of the operating context of the institution that cannot be easily encapsulated within a planning document.

There was a general recognition and support for the proposal that the detail of visits should be set individually, in advance, with the institution concerned, to ensure effectiveness. The intention of the visits is to help the Council to understand what the institution perceives to be its major issues and what it sees as its next steps to take. We wish to emphasise that, with careful advance preparation of the agenda, our intention is that meetings should be helpful for both the Council and institutions.

Officers will now begin preparation for a cycle of institutional visits to commence in late autumn 2004. We will contact you again, in the near future, with further details.

PHILIP GUMMETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE