Widening Access Strategies 2002/03 to 2004/05

To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

Summary: This circular presents a summary of institutional widening access strategies for 2002/03 to 2004/05

Response by: No response required

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WIDENING ACCESS STRATEGIES 2002/03 TO 2004/05

INTRODUCTION

1   This circular presents a summary of institutional widening access strategies for 2002/03 to 2004/05.

CONTEXT

2   2004/05 marks the end of the current three-year period for institutional widening access strategies. Institutions submitted full strategies to the Council in 2002/03 and provided progress reports and updated plans for the year ahead in the two following years.

3   A number of factors have influenced widening access activities and strategies during this plan period within the sector as a whole and in individual institutions. The request for strategies was made shortly after the publication by the Welsh Assembly Government of its strategy for higher education to 2010, *Reaching Higher*.   This identified widening access as a key priority and set a target for Wales. This target in the *Reaching Higher* document focused on participation by young people in Wales from neighbourhoods under-represented in HE, but this was soon amended to cover all-age participation from Community First areas in Wales.   Following feedback from institutions and discussions between HEFCW and Welsh Assembly Government, the definition of this target has been further refined:

>   *To increase the number of all undergraduate new entrants to HE courses at UK HEIs and FEIs who are domiciled in the Welsh Communities First areas. This will be measured by monitoring the proportion of undergraduate new entrants to courses who are domiciled in the Communities First areas equivalent to the 100 Most Deprived Electoral Divisions, which is targeted to rise from 8.9% to 11.4% by 2010* (Circular W04/74HE, November 2004).

4   It has been important for institutions to recognise the particular dimensions of this target for Wales, especially as there has been confusion outside Wales, and sometimes within Wales, because of a different target for HE in England which is concerned with overall participation by 18 to 30 year olds, rather than specific "widening access" groups as such.

5   *Reaching Higher* also highlighted improving participation by disabled students and students from ethnic minorities as target areas.   The Council is aware that the fact that precise target definitions have not yet been determined makes it difficult for institutions to set their own targets which can be seen to contribute coherently to sector-wide progress.   Nonetheless, general principles of fair access to higher education as well as responsibilities and obligations arising from recent legislation have meant that institutions give increasing attention to inclusivity and equal opportunities, including race equality and provision for disabled students.

6   When the initial request for the strategies was issued in June 2002, institutions were aware that the Welsh Assembly Government would be making additional funding available to "support innovative initiatives aimed at extending access to those from groups with a limited history of participation in higher education . . . . . available to those pursuing collaborative working opportunities".   The precise details of how the funding was to be used, however, had not been decided at this time.   The funding led to the establishment of the *Reaching Wider* initiative - four *Reaching Wider* partnerships between HEIs, further education colleges and other partners covering North Wales, West and Mid Wales, South-West Wales and South-East Wales, together with co-ordination at national level.   The Council has been keen to encourage institutions to adopt an increasingly co-ordinated and collaborative approach to widening access and

to build coherence and complementarity between institutional strategies and *Reaching Wider* programmes. This focus was emphasised by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in her February 2004 remit letter to the Council where she noted that she wished to see "a holistic approach to widening access".

7   The summary below is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of all the activities which institutions in Wales are undertaking through their widening access strategies, but rather to draw out some of the main themes and developments, and good practice. Some examples of activity at individual institutions are noted, many of which will be well-known in the sector through publicity and dissemination between institutions and through conferences etc. Again, they are not intended to provide an exhaustive list and because an activity is mentioned at one institution, it does not imply that other institutions may not be doing something similar.

SHORT TO MEDIUM-TERM PLANNING

8   Institutions were initially asked to provide strategies which covered at least a three-year period, so that they could take a medium-term view of their plans for widening access. Inevitably, the main focus for detailed planning of activities is the immediate year ahead, with institutions rolling forward these operational plans each year. This allows institutions to respond to changing circumstances and to revise and develop activities in the light of experience to date. However, the extent to which institutions set the operational year within a longer-term strategy varies, as does their particular approach to doing this. Generally, the strategies are set within the context of the institutions' overall strategic plans, and within that a mission/vision for widening access. Many strategies are characterised by medium-term aims and strategic goals, and/or identify particular priorities on which they want to concentrate for the planning period. Some strategies express these fairly generally, others are more specific about what they want to achieve or how they will build incrementally towards achieving these goals.

Targets

9   Institutions set targets at a variety of levels and using a range of indicators. Many institutions measure themselves against particular benchmarks and report on these in their strategies. These include the Performance Indicators relevant to widening access, equal opportunities and student retention published jointly on behalf of the UK higher education funding bodies. Occasionally, performance that measures up to or exceeds these benchmarks may lead the institution to consider that it does not require specific targets, or it may set an overarching aim of maintaining its position. Others give themselves more precise targets, usually for incremental improvements. While this is important for areas where institutions may already be performing well, it is, as might be expected, crucial where they deem that they are falling short. For a few institutions, for example, student retention has been highlighted.

10   The Council recognises the continued good showing of Wales against the UK benchmarks, welcoming the positive outcomes each year. It would nonetheless encourage all institutions to set themselves realistic yet challenging widening participation targets. If sector-wide/UK performance improves, benchmarks will be raised. Institutions therefore need to review their position regularly and focus their targets and activities towards continually improving their position as individual institutions and in contributing to Wales-wide performance.

11   Measuring performance in a UK context is important but it needs to work in tandem with the Welsh Assembly Government's particular aspirations for access to higher education by people living in Wales itself. The *Reaching Higher* Communities First target is a key priority. Institutions have during the planning period been developing or embedding their approach to widening access targets for Welsh-domiciled or local students. A few institutions are looking in considerable detail at the make-up of their

student population and the targets they set themselves in terms of recruitment within Wales for students from disadvantaged or under-represented communities and groups as a result.

12   Targets and measures are a feature of the programmes and activities which institutions undertake as part of their widening access strategies. This can include setting timetables and/or measurable targets for: engagement with schools, communities, workplaces, and students on-campus; introducing new student support systems and facilities; undertaking surveys, research projects and evaluations; reviews of approaches and policies on specific aspects of widening access; reorganisation of internal management and monitoring procedures. Some strategies approach this in a very detailed way, others are more broad-brush. Institutions report on the volume of activity in a particular year but, if they have not included precise initial targets within their strategies, they may not be able to judge whether they have achieved all they intended. As might be expected, the strategies which demonstrate a comprehensive approach to target-setting are those which are most able to demonstrate their progress. Progress against targets is, however, not simply a matter of achieving a set number of activities or completing a programme to timescale but also of assessing their quality and impact. There will always be a great deal of "widening access activity" which is not amenable to formal target setting, such as building up partnerships and presence within the community and taking advantage of new opportunities as they arise. This broader canvas against which institutions operate is very clear in some of the strategies and progress reports.

Arrangements for management, planning, implementation and monitoring

13   Institutions now have established arrangements for planning, implementing and monitoring their widening access strategies, usually through appropriate committees which are integrated into the main planning structures of the institutions. Overall responsibility usually rests with a member of senior management, such as a Pro-Vice-Chancellor. There are often various networks and fora which feed into the development and dissemination of the strategy. There is in many instances a dedicated widening access function, headed by a senior member of staff, tasked with taking forward particular aspects of the strategy, as well as working with departments and staff across the institution to embed and co-ordinate the implementation of the strategy as a whole.

14   In many strategies, it is clear that widening access is no longer considered a separate activity but that it impacts across the work of the institution. Institutions acknowledge the links between widening access and other strategies such as learning and teaching, third mission and employability. In some strategies, there is evidence of an increasingly integrated approach. This is particularly true of institutions where a significant proportion of enrolments are drawn from under-represented groups and neighbourhoods and/or where the institution sees part of its mission as substantially serving students within their region. Here the emphasis on meeting the learning needs of a diverse and often, non-traditional, student population can be very strong.

RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES

15   Some strategies refer to targeted recruitment and marketing activities, including through local networks and partnerships. This can be part of a general strategy geared to local recruitment or more specifically focused on under-represented and Community First areas. As well as events in the community and schools, it can include open-days, "drop-in shops", raising awareness of the institution through stories in the local press, and additional newspaper supplements which as well as informing students of the choices on offer, can highlight the financial and other support available to students.

16   There are references to increasing attention to monitoring the various stages of the recruitment and selection process with a view to widening access and taking account of equality and diversity issues.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND RETENTION

17   In *Reaching Higher* the Minister emphasised that "the retention [of students in HE] is as important as recruitment" and that "widening access to those who were traditionally under represented in higher education brings new challenges for student retention. These groups frequently need higher levels of support than has traditionally been available".

18   All institutions covered the issue of student retention within the initial widening access strategies, which they submitted in 2002/03, although some did this in more depth than others. The updates and progress reports submitted in the two subsequent years show an increasing focus on student retention.

19   In the strategies submitted in 2002/03, institutions approached retention in a number of ways, from providing a specific institutional target on retention or a discrete section to demonstrate institutional action in this area, to retention-associated objectives dispersed throughout the plan. A starting point for most HEIs was institutional performance as demonstrated in the annual publication of UK Performance Indicators, including comparison against the adjusted sector benchmark appropriate to their institution. Improvement in their retention rates was often then presented as a key target for the planning period.   Sometimes targets are set for particular course or curriculum areas where a problem has been identified.

20   Supporting students through their studies is recognised by HEIs as one of the most significant areas which can improve the retention of students.   The increasing investment in providing such support in a variety of ways has been apparent during the three-year period 2002/03 to 2004/05.

21   The support can be provided through a range of formal and informal approaches. There may be a central "function" or officer with overall responsibility, but also networks of staff with a particular responsibility for retention or learning support. Study, IT, revision and examination skills are covered, as well as literacy, numeracy and statistical skills. One institution notes support programmes covering self-esteem, assertiveness and confidence building. Support may be provided through drop-in centres, one-to-one as well as workshop and group sessions.   Depending on the size of the institution, such facilities might initially have been piloted or developed in a few locations but by now are often being expanded across the campus, perhaps using libraries or resource centres or giving departments and schools an increasing role, particularly in a subject-specific context. Specialist and personal tutors are considered essential support mechanisms for all students. In some cases, study-skills modules can be an accredited part of a course, particularly at Level 0 or Level 1. Extra support may be provided for students who had to resit part of their course to be able to proceed. Student mentors or peer-assisted learning and "buddy" schemes are highlighted.

22   The strategy updates reflect other developments in learning and teaching which can support retention. For example, some strategies mention how they are encouraging students to reflect on their skills and development needs through personal development/progress files, both in terms of completing their courses successfully and of their future employability and career prospects. Providing study skills support and materials on-line is increasing.

23   Another feature which has been apparent for some time is bringing together various support functions, welfare, financial advice, counselling, health services, often to try and create a "one-stop-shop" or ensure that services are easily accessible by students.

This approach reflects awareness of the importance of inclusive services which cater for the diverse needs of the student populations. Institutions recognise their responsibilities to provide support services for all their students as well as the vital role they play in helping to prevent students from withdrawing from courses for personal or other reasons. Specific appointments, such as that of a mental health adviser, have been made in some cases. Measures have been put in place by some HEIs to assist in the diagnosis and assessment of certain disabilities.

24   Several strategies note the practical support which can prevent students from withdrawing, such as provision of IT equipment which they could not otherwise afford, travel support funding, hardship funding and bursaries, and childcare facilities.

25   Some strategies note an emphasis on trying to ensure that students do not "drop-out" before or in the early stages of their courses or between the semesters or years of a course. Approaches can include: providing pre-course information both through mailings and on-line and "refresher" or familiarisation days for new students; ensuring that they start as soon as possible on the courses, without an overlong induction period: reducing the inter-semester break to lessen disruption to work patterns; offering refresher days between course years, including support for the changing demands of the course as students progress. One institution notes that student feedback through focus groups is an important element.

26   Institutions recognise that support to aid retention is not confined to on-campus or full-time students, but should extend to part-time and outreach students who can be isolated without access to appropriate guidance and facilities. As well as face-to-face support, on-line information is being increasingly developed. There is a recognition of the specific needs of home-based students to ensure that they are aware of the support services available and the nature of student life. One institution notes that it has developed a scheme, which it hopes to expand, where students can borrow and return University library books through their local libraries.

27   As institutions' strategies have developed over this period, they are seeking to ensure that their approaches to retention are based on an understanding of the profile of their student population through evaluative studies and monitoring retention and progression, including for particular groups, such as students from economically or socially deprived areas, disabled students, part-time students, or students from different minority ethnic groups. This can then lead to the development of particular targeted retention strategies for these groups.

28   Staff development, in the context of student retention, is an increasingly significant feature of the strategies. This can include raising awareness of equal opportunities and diversity issues, including in relation to disabled students or students from minority ethnic communities, how to provide guidance and support for students, and to devise alternative teaching and assessment strategies as appropriate.

ENGAGING WITH SCHOOLS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

29   The range of activities in which institutions are engaging to raise aspirations and achievement amongst young people, both as individual institutions and as members of their *Reaching Wider* partnerships is considerable. Taking the sector as a whole, these now cover, in different ways, all years of secondary education with growing intervention at primary-school level. Particularly for Years 12 and 13, and increasingly at GCSE level as well, these are often part of compact arrangements with the HEI and schools and FE colleges. One institution notes that it has relaunched its programme as a "membership club" with membership packs and a website, and is extending the programme to Year 9 pupils.

30 Activities featured in institutions' strategies include: Aiming for College Education (ACE) and HE taster days: master classes and revision sessions, GCSE homework clubs; using student tutors, mentors and ambassadors; student shadowing by Year 12 pupils; youth focus groups, involvement in young people's partnerships; study-skills sessions, including using the internet as a resource; sixth-form induction and UCAS planning days; mock interviews; financial advice about HE; use of mobile exhibition units, competitions. One institution noted how applications had increased following the help given with the UCAS process. Another strategy highlights support for teachers, for example, training in ICT skills and internet and in developing and leading compact schemes.

31 Some of these activities are regular programmes or are timetabled through the year, others are part of residential or day visits during vacation periods. Summer university and school programmes to encourage 16+ students to aspire to HE and to help prepare them for this are a feature of many strategies. These can be residential programmes of varying lengths or attended daily. As well as academic support, social activities and giving a taste of student life and independent living are a major aspect in these programmes.

32 Activities with younger children including at primary level tend to focus on the fun of learning and general motivation. They also aim to introduce the concept of the university as integral part of the community and a natural expectation in life. Some do work on supporting the transition from primary to secondary education. Some institutions are involved with their local authorities and communities in Children's University programmes.

33 As well as "generic" activities, there is a wide range of programmes which engage children and young people through a particular interest or subject. Sport is seen as an important element in attracting young people, through, for example, "learning through sport schemes", after school clubs, sports camps. One strategy describes a programme based on horse care and riding focusing on children who are underachieving or at risk of exclusion from school. As well as educational skills and motivation, such schemes help promote healthy living and social skills. Innovative schemes using science and engineering are prominent – these can include involvement in national/UK initiatives or schemes run by the institution, the *Reaching Wider* partnership or other local partnerships. Some of these may be focused on stimulating interest in the subject generally, and will contribute to raising aspirations amongst those who might otherwise be disaffected from education; others may have a more specific widening access focus. The list below gives some examples of activities mentioned in the strategies:

- University of Glamorgan - host for SETPOINT Wales, part of a UK initiative dedicated to promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics to all pupils;
- NEWI - linking its Techniquest operation with widening access and experience of HE events. Racing car scheme involving students from low participation neighbourhoods;
- UW Aberystwyth – placements for 6th formers on Nuffield Science Bursaries and aiming to encourage more applications from Community First areas;
- Cardiff University - specific programmes for mathematics and sciences disciplines – summer schools, day events, bridging programmes. Medical School – "Step up to Health" Compact Scheme;
- Swansea Institute of Higher Education – Engineering simulator.

34 The creative and performing arts and design are also used to motivate students and improve achievement, including through art clubs and literature festivals. Swansea Institute uses art and design students as role models in schools with an annual exhibition of work done by the schools. Trinity College has activities focused on the

creative and performing arts which draw in schools and the community. As part of its contribution to the South-East Wales Reaching Wider partnership (*First Campus)*, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama provides workshops in schools in a range of instruments and music styles.

35   Several strategies refer to involving parents as much as possible in some of their activities, both to help and support them in motivating their children but to raise awareness of their own potential to aspire to higher education.

36   A number of strategies describe how they are trying to track students on various schemes and compacts, not just in school or college, but whether they progress into HE afterwards, although it is rarely possible to obtain a complete picture for all students.   For those who proceed into an HEI through a compact scheme, there may also be monitoring of progress.   One institution found that there was no significant difference in first-year performance of compact students and those who were admitted through other routes.

LINKS WITH FE COLLEGES

37   FE colleges are members of the *Reaching Wider* partnerships and both contribute to and benefit from the partnerships' widening access activities.   In many instances they are themselves beneficiaries of HEI activities such as compact schemes and related programmes.   For some institutions, collaborative links with FE colleges for delivering HE in FE are a significant element in making HE locally available to students who, for various reasons, would not immediately consider attending an HEI.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

38   Improving skills and educational opportunities through work-based learning has become more prominent in the strategies over the period.   Foundation degrees, sometimes in partnership with FE colleges, are one element of this, with a few institutions having substantial portfolios, and others choosing particular niche areas or building provision up more slowly. The accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) is growing.   One institution refers to plans to set up an outreach centre on a business park to increase participation by SME and public services employees; another to establishing workplace co-ordinators and setting up venues in workplaces; some mention the development of online provision within portfolios of workplace courses. Partnerships with local organisations and with trade unions are important, as is an emphasis on developing appropriate progression routes into further HE study.

WORK WITH ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES AND INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

39   The importance of taking provision to students is emphasised.   This is not just to enable students, who might find a college or university off-putting, to undertake their courses in a familiar environment or to be able to work flexibly around other commitments, but because for many the costs of travelling are prohibitive.   Waiving or reducing fees is also key.   Provision is often delivered through outreach centres and venues in particular communities, both in disadvantaged urban areas and rural and socially isolated communities where there are few opportunities for higher education study.   Mobile classrooms and specially-equipped buses which can provide a regular physical HE presence are used.   One new development on the horizon here is a collaboration between UW Bangor, the BBC and the Welsh Language Board for a lifelong-learning Bus, HYSBYS, which will provide a bilingual mobile outreach facility particularly in rural communities.   Using ICT and online learning is becoming more common.   UW Swansea works with twelve community partners in the Connecting Communities Cymru project to develop community-based lifelong learning using ICT.

UW Aberystwyth is involved in the Sci-By Bus which operates in Ceredigion to increase the number of adults taking up learning opportunities in Science.

40   The strategies stress the continuing importance of informal and non-accredited learning as a vital element in confidence building and aspiration raising as a precursor to more formal, accredited HE provision. An important part of this is helping students to identify and value their existing skills and experience. Such provision is usually combined with equipping students with key skills, including ICT, and study skills, as well as educational advice and guidance. UWIC, for example, notes such short courses through its Access Summer School and related outreach programmes have increased mature student enrolments on mainstream UWIC courses.

41   ICT courses are seen as important both in building confidence and providing adults with skills to facilitate further study. UW Swansea notes how it can provide a "hook" to encourage people to progress from taster courses to accredited provision, including for male students from groups or communities traditionally under-represented in higher education, while UW Lampeter stresses the importance of the acquisition of ICT skills for social and educational development in rural areas. As in work with young people, the creative arts provide HE experience. UWIC notes that its Cardiff Open Art School offers informal and accredited short-course programmes in art and design for mature adult returners in an environment where young and mature students work together.

42   Progression is provided through accredited programmes giving qualifications in their own right or which contribute to, or provide entry, to further HE study, including part-time degree programmes. Such provision is often tailored to the needs of the communities or groups with which institutions are working, for example, citizenship, community leadership and development, health-related issues, exploring particular local cultural, social or historical topics. Both accredited and non-accredited provision is reinforced by summer schools and HE taster days.

43   Institutions are beginning to focus more on intergenerational learning through family learning events, the development of intergenerational learning modules and programmes, encouraging parents to become involved in the activities and programmes HEIs undertake in schools and, as part of this, encouraging them to raise their own educational aspirations and take advantage of HE taster opportunities. The University of Glamorgan runs a 24 hour Community Radio station with participation by schools, students and other members of the local community, using its mobile classroom for roadshows. This aims to provide an alternative approach to education through an accredited radio module and other training programmes.

44   What comes out strongly taking the strategies as a whole is the range of partnerships and organisations with which institutions are involved. Some of this takes place through the Reaching Wider partnerships, but also through other local projects and schemes in which institutions take part, as well generally being represented on various groups and committees. This demonstrates the extent to which institutions contribute overall to community regeneration. This is reinforced by the fact that much of their provision in community learning programmes is geared to empowering individuals to improve their environment as well as providing them with skills, educational qualifications and aspirations to progress.

DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Disability Provision Development Plans

45   In 2002/03, institutions were asked to incorporate their Disability Provision Development plans (DPDPs) into their Widening Access strategies. The level of integration between the DPDPs and the main plans has varied, with most institutions choosing to append the DPDP as a separate annex, whilst others included information on developments in this area in the main body of their widening access plans. However, the Council's main concern was to receive DPDPs, in whichever format, that were strategic and would help institutions plan effectively over the following three years.

46   Institutions submitted full strategies in 2002/03, and briefer updates in the following two years. Most institutions note the measures that are in place for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the disability provision strategies, such as making use of disability working groups, with some ensuring that their cyclical strategic planning models could feed into future strategies. Many note specifically how they ensure that students are directly involved through opportunities for feedback, such as satisfaction surveys. Institutions continue to use the Performance Indicators to evaluate their performance in recruiting and retaining disabled students. Some note how they have ensured that analysis of offers against applications and examination performance is undertaken for disabled students.

47   Audits, such as those in the areas of estates, curriculum or services, have, on the whole, been used as a basis for future planning, particularly since one of the requirements of the additional 2002 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Planning funding stream was to ensure that audits were undertaken. Institutions have appreciated that audits should be undertaken every few years to ensure policies and provision are up to date, particularly given the requirements of current legislation and the likelihood of increased obligations in the future. As well as the audits, work undertaken through the DDA Planning funding included: designing appropriate recruitment procedures; improving physical access; improving sensory access; improving learning and assistive technologies infrastructure; and staff awareness training.

48   Collaboration with other HE and FE institutions is a theme that has emerged from the three-year strategies, which will benefit the progression of students in a number of institutions, and the overall provision available in the sector. These might include collaborative dyslexia or mental health provision, or sharing assessment centre expertise. Indeed, a small number of institutions have gone a step further, ensuring that any successful project work that is undertaken can be disseminated to the sector as a whole.

49   Much of the funding set aside by institutions for developments is used for additional staffing. However, given that the level of funding awarded to each institution annually can vary, it could be beneficial if institutions were able to consider measures to eventually fund them as part of core activity, thus consolidating the posts and reducing the need for short-term contracts, which may restrict recruitment. Where this has happened, it would be helpful if institutions could note it in their strategies. Having said that, if the disability premium ensures the continuity of a post that might otherwise disappear, we welcome the use of HEFCW funding in this way.

50   Institutions have been demonstrating an increasing awareness of the need to ensure that academic departments take ownership of some of the measures that can be put in place to assist disabled students in their academic pursuits. Training has been a key component of increasing awareness across the board in institutions. They have also been putting measures in place to ensure that disabled international students, who are not eligible for a Disabled Students' Allowance, are supported fully.

51   Although HEFCW no longer has statutory responsibility to request Disability Statements, the Council feels they continue to be a useful tool to let potential students know about participation in higher education and how to access further information.

52   As they continue their planning of provision for disabled students, we would encourage institutions to take account of the recommendations in the Disability Rights Commission report on auxiliary aids and services in higher education, *Taking Away the Strain.* This gives useful advice on how HEIs can undertake anticipatory measures when considering the provision of auxiliary aids and services for disabled students. It is clear that some are already considering collaborative measures to assist the provision of auxiliary aids and services by creating databases of local services.

Equal Opportunities

53   Provision for disabled students is one aspect of equal opportunities. Race equality is another as is treating the Welsh and English languages on the basis of equality. However, institutions are recognising that these are part of a spectrum of equal opportunities issues which affects how institutions engage with their staff as employers and with students and prospective students. These all bring particular legal obligations which are likely to increase in the future. Many of the strategies show that institutions are aiming to approach these responsibilities in an integrated way, through, for example, the appointment of equal opportunities officers and Welsh Language Scheme officers and the establishment of equal opportunities or equality and diversity committees, sometimes with other committees concentrating on particular aspects of these agendas. Appropriate staff training is arranged, including for those involved with the recruitment and selection of staff and students.

54   Institutions are gathering and monitoring data on staff and students in relation to race, gender, disability, and whether they are Welsh-speaking, and looking at this in terms of student admissions and progression and staff recruitment and career progression.

55   Some strategies note how they are working towards the development of curricula which recognise the need for inclusiveness and meeting the needs of a diverse student population. One strategy notes that a project is being undertaken across the institution to identify the needs and aspirations of students from ethnic minorities to increase access, progression and completion. Others refer to particular research projects which reflect the nature of their own particular communities, for example, where there are established ethnic communities within large urban areas or in less densely urbanised areas where ethnic minority groups may be very transient. One HEI has established the post of accessible curriculum adviser in order to ensure inclusive practice and to be responsive to the needs of students, including disabled students.

56   This inclusivity is becoming evident as well in institutions' activities with schools and in the community. Some strategies note actions to make their programmes for young people and schools accessible to disabled students and monitor numbers of disabled students so that they work towards achieving fair representation. Trinity College notes how, as part of a family learning project, it was able help parents and children at a primary school improve their communication with a profoundly deaf child, lessening the child's isolation, as well as giving parents new skills in sign language. Another strategy refers to making sure, as part of its overall programme, that it targets schools with relatively high numbers of black and minority ethnic learners. UW Newport notes that the programme for its Community Learning HE Certificate in Combined Open Studies operates in disadvantaged valley and city communities where the numbers of registered disabled people are above the national averages and that its community-based learning initiatives contain focussed provision to make links and progression routes for Black and Minority Ethnic learners.

57   One aspect which comes through in some of the most recent strategy progress reports is recognition of the need to cater for asylum seekers. University of Wales Swansea highlights how development workers in its Pathways for Ethnic Minorities Programme have engaged with new residents from countries such as Afghanistan and Zimbabwe and that flexibility and working with other organisations is essential to meet the ever-changing needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

Welsh language and Welsh medium work

58   In their 2004/05 progress reports we asked institutions to consider, whether within their widening access priorities and programmes, strategies make provision for Welsh-speaking students or Welsh-speaking communities.

59   The way in which institutions are meeting the needs of Welsh-speaking students, as well as raising awareness of the potential for higher education through the medium of Welsh varies. In terms of the bilingual services which they provide for students, this is by now guided in most institutions by their Welsh language schemes. In terms of activities with local schools and communities, offering bilingual or Welsh medium opportunities is more integral in areas with higher concentrations of Welsh-speakers, although here as well, the institutions would acknowledge that there is more work which could be done to increase the level of activity and on piloting and evaluating innovative approaches. Elsewhere there is evidence of the development of Welsh medium resources and specifically targeted events. Some of the activities which are noted are: residential schools to promote and support the Welsh language for a range of academic study and provide progression pathways; providing "stepping up" and confidence building programmes for Welsh first language speakers and proficient learners to move into accredited HE programmes; mentoring of pupils in Welsh medium schools; bilingual materials and support for mobile exhibition and classroom "buses", including UW Aberystwyth's Sci-By Bus, UW Bangor's HYSBYS; and Cardiff University using a mobile education unit for a medical roadshow in Welsh-speaking communities. The University of Glamorgan's Community Radio provides four hours Welsh language broadcasting daily, sponsored by the Welsh Language Board.

REACHING WIDER PARTNERSHIPS

60   The progress reports for 2004/05 show that on the whole institutions see their role within the *Reaching Wider* partnerships as enhancing their institutional widening access activities, with frequent references to work they are undertaking through the partnerships. It is evident that, for some smaller institutions, involvement in the partnerships has enabled them to be involved in a broader range of widening access activity than would be possible as an individual institution. However, as yet it is less clear how far the concept of the *Reaching Wider* partnership as a potential overall focus for widening access within the partnership area is permeating through individual institutions, or how far institutions would feel able to co-ordinate a broader range of complementary widening access work from their portfolio of institutional activity within the partnership framework.

EXTERNAL FUNDING

61   There is considerable evidence in the strategies that many institutions are taking advantage of opportunities to lever in external funding for many of their activities, often in partnership with other organisations or as part of the *Reaching Wider* partnerships. As well as current projects, the 2004/05 updates refer to proposals that are under development or being considered by the grant awarding bodies.

62   External grants can include schemes supported by European funding, Welsh Assembly Government grants, and involvement in UK and local initiatives. Sometimes bids for funding are led by the HEI, in others they are contributors to bids put forward with other

partners. Often there may be a combination of external funding sources or contribution in kind of equipment and staff. Some work is undertaken through projects funded by ELWa. As in the case of European funding, large sums may be involved, in other instances quite small grants can enable a particular project or activity. A few examples are:

- Mid and West Wales Reaching Wider partnership (HE partners, UW Aberystwyth, UW Lampeter, Trinity College), European funding for the Summer University programme;
- University of Glamorgan – European funding for the Llynfi valley project (adult learners). Hosting Wales Centre for Intergenerational Practice (Welsh Assembly Government/Beth Johnson Foundation);
- UW Aberystwyth: European funding for the new Sci-By Bus (with a trailer and equipment donated by Careers Wales) – widening access to Science in the Community;
- UW Bangor: Partnership with the Welsh Language Board and the BBC for HYSBYS, lifelong learning bus;
- Cardiff University: Involvement in EU funded Skill Wales/NIACE and Welsh Dyslexia Project initiative (with European partners);
- University of Wales Swansea: European funding for the Pathways for Ethnic Minorities Project and the Foundation in Technology programme;
- University of Wales Institute, Cardiff – European-funded programmes to deliver innovative and accredited and informal learning packages to SMEs and community groups;
- University of Wales, Newport: European funding to underpin projects in the Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning; Welsh Assembly Government Sustainable Health Action Research Project, smaller grants from organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation;
- NEWI – Techniquest which is part-funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

63   One institution, while emphasising that maximising a blend of funding sources is essential, does highlight the uncertainties which short-term funding of this kind brings and the dangers of raising aspirations which are then unable to be fulfilled over the longer term. It therefore sees sustainability and mainstreaming as an integral part of the future development of its strategy.

DEVELOPING AND DISSEMINATING GOOD PRACTICE

64   As noted above on Student Retention, institutions are generally seeking to underpin their widening access activity through research and evaluation projects, sometimes internally, sometimes through partnerships and involvement in joint or external projects. Ensuring that the outcomes of this work are disseminated both internally through networks and seminars, and externally through publication, web resources and conferences, is becoming an increasingly prominent part of institutional widening access activity. University of Wales, Newport notes collaboration across Wales for a new online directory of widening access projects at Welsh HEIs which it is hosting on behalf of the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) Cymru (http://wipp.newport.ac.uk/).