



## INTRODUCTION

1. This circular invites institutions' views on the findings of the national evaluation of widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative.
2. The executive summary, including the report's conclusions and recommendations, is attached as **Annex A**. The full report will be available in the consultation section of the HEFCW website: [www.hefcw.ac.uk](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk) from 5 March 2007.
3. Responses to this consultation are invited by **Friday 20 April 2007**. We will use the responses to inform our final advice on future widening access policy development to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in June 2007.

## BACKGROUND

4. HEFCW is committed to building an evidenced-based approach to policy development and implementation. We recognise that it is essential to ensure that the findings from intelligence, research, consultations and evaluations contribute to our planning, development and future funding processes.
5. The Welsh Assembly Government 2006-07 remit letter to HEFCW requested that we:

*take stock during 2006 of whether, and if so what, changes should be introduced at national level, and through Reaching Wider partnerships, so as to ensure that we maintain progress towards progressively opening up HE opportunities to all parts of our society.*

Advice was also requested on:

*whether further specific steps should be taken to reflect the particular circumstances of young people entering higher education having been in care.*

6. HEFCW commissioned an evaluation of the widening access policy area, in response to this request. The evaluation was to:
  - investigate the development, progress and impact of widening access funded activities in higher education institutions;
  - assess the equality of opportunity provided by widening access activities evidenced by the impact on groups under-represented in higher education including people with a care background;
  - assess the extent to which widening access activities in HE were aligned, or planned alignment, with the Reaching Wider Initiative;
  - investigate the development, progress and impact of the Reaching Wider initiative on the Welsh Assembly Government's *Reaching Higher* widening access target groups.
7. **Annex B** outlines the evaluation's aims and objectives. We appointed Arad Consulting in September 2006 to undertake the evaluation and a report was submitted to us in January 2007.
8. In their data collection and reporting we specifically requested that Arad Consulting investigate widening access activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative separately, but also, where appropriate, to identify any issues common

to the two areas. We made this request to ensure that both funded areas received equal treatment.

## THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

9. We submitted the evaluation report and our initial advice to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in February 2007. We also confirmed our intention to consult on the report's findings, which would further inform our advice to the Minister about how the evaluation outcomes should be taken forward. The consultation process will enable the higher education sector and other key stakeholders to comment on the report's conclusions and recommendations and to allow an opportunity for the Council's Widening Access Committee to advise us on proposals for future action. We intend to report to the Minister on the consultation outcomes, together with our advice at the end of June 2007. Attached, as **Annex C**, is the consultation schedule.
10. To support our consultation process and build on the evaluation findings we have asked Arad Consulting to extend its work and to consult key stakeholders on the report findings. We anticipate that Arad Consulting will want to consult with widening access and Reaching Wider beneficiaries, amongst others, and we hope that you are able to support Arad Consulting with this work.

## THE EVALUATION REPORT

11. This is the first major audit of this policy area in Wales and as such it provides us with a useful general survey of widening access activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative. The evaluation provides a benchmark on which we can build in future and we are content to use it as the basis for further consultation. Notwithstanding this, we are aware of some limitations within the report, although these are no different from other UK analogous studies. The report should be read with the caveat that the sample data set is unavoidably small, measurable impact is somewhat limited after only three years of the Reaching Wider Initiative, and the causality of HE progression from a specific intervention is often difficult to prove, particularly with widening access interventions with pre-16 year old participants.
12. From a combination of desk research, interviews, focus groups and questionnaire analysis the evaluation report presents conclusions and recommendations for the Welsh Assembly Government, HEFCW and HEIs to consider. The recommendations are found in the executive summary, attached as **Annex A**, and in **section eight, pages 56-63** of the full evaluation report. In outline the key findings of the evaluation are as follows:
  - i. As expected from a diverse sector, the development, implementation and coordination of institutions' widening access strategies varies widely. Different management models exist and the report suggests that it might be beneficial to share methodologies across the sector.
  - ii. The monitoring and tracking of both widening access and Reaching Wider cohorts to demonstrate the impact of funded activities is, generally, at an early stage of development and most HEIs should further consider how to evidence both quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

- iii. Retention strategies and student support have received increased recognition in the 2006/09 Widening Access Strategies, together with targeted staff development to provide equality of opportunity for an increasingly diverse student population. The report examines the extent to which HEIs make effective links between widening access-related retention issues and student support.
  - iv. The impact, efficiency and value for money from both widening access and Reaching Wider activities proved difficult to evidence, as similar UK-wide research confirms. The reasons for this include: difficulties in unequivocally linking attendance at a funded intervention to higher education progression; the length of time required to progress from aspiration-raising activities (at, for example, age 12) to HE entry at age 18 plus; and as noted above, the limited tracking and monitoring systems currently in place. Notwithstanding this, the sector has made progress towards the Reaching Higher widening access targets, with further progress predicted to 2010.
  - v. Reaching Wider Partnerships would benefit from longer-term funding enabling them to be more innovative, strategically plan across their regions in the medium- to long-term, establish strong networks with external providers and sponsors, or maintain experienced staff.
  - vi. Reaching Wider activities have largely focused on school age interventions, given the initial guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW. With demographic trends predicting a decrease in young people, and the increasing need for a skilled workforce, the report recommends greater engagement with adults.
  - vii. The academic, financial and support needs of care leavers should be considered by HEIs, HEFCW and the Assembly, together with identified good practice, within Wales and the UK, to ensure equality of opportunity.
13. In summary the recommendations propose that:
- i. HEIs consider more effective student tracking and monitoring systems for widening access; the interrogation and use of non-completion data to inform retention strategies; cross-sector information sharing on widening access coordination and funding models.
  - ii. The Reaching Wider Initiative considers the need for Partnerships to reaffirm a commitment to all Reaching Higher widening access targets, but to prioritise activities to meet regional need; and for HEFCW to consider the current partnerships' regional structures to ensure effective contributions towards the targets.
  - iii. The Reaching Wider Initiative funding processes, including longer-term funding to support strategic planning and innovation are reviewed.
  - iv. Both HEIs and the Reaching Wider Initiative further respond to the needs of adult learners and care leavers, and the sharing of good practice.

## **ISSUES FOR CONSULTATION**

14. Drawing on the conclusions and recommendations set out in evaluation report, the main issues on which we would welcome views are as follows:

### **Widening Access Activities**

Recommendations 1 – 5 focus on widening access funded activities. In your view:

- i. Do the evaluation report findings provide an accurate assessment of widening access funded activities across the Welsh higher education sector? If not, why not?
- ii. Do the evaluation report findings on widening access activities focus on key widening access issues? (The issues considered include monitoring and tracking, retention and non-completion, institutional funding models, evaluation processes to demonstrate impact.) If, in your opinion, other key issues should be considered please provide more information with examples or evidence to support this view.
- iii. In what ways might higher education institutions benefit from an understanding of other institutions' widening access funding models?
- iv. The evaluation found limited evidence to demonstrate the impact of widening access funded activities. Can further, robust quantitative and/or qualitative data be provided to demonstrate the impact of widening access activities?
- v. Tracking and monitoring of widening access cohorts provides evidence of successful progression through higher education. How could tracking and monitoring processes be improved (a) within your institution (b) between institutions and sectors and (c) Wales-wide? Are there examples of good practice in tracking and monitoring that you would be willing to share?
- vi. What other factors, policy areas or initiatives should the Widening Access Committee consider when advising the Welsh Assembly Government on future widening access policy developments?

### **The Reaching Wider Initiative**

Recommendations 6 -9 focus on the Reaching Wider Initiative. In your view:

- vii. Do the evaluation report findings provide an accurate assessment of the Reaching Wider Initiative? If not, why not?
- viii. Do the evaluation report findings focus on the key issues for Reaching Wider (ie the Partnerships' effectiveness, structure, and the Initiative's funding)? If, in your opinion, other key issues should be considered please provide more information with examples or evidence to support this view.

### **Cross-cutting Themes**

Recommendations 10 – 11 comment on cross-cutting themes which impact on both widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative. In your view:

- ix. In the light of the report's findings on impact and outcomes, how should examples of good practice be evidenced and disseminated?
- x. If recommendation 11, on targeting of adult learners is accepted, how might Partnerships and HEIs address this recommendation in the short- and medium term? What might be the implications for the Reaching Higher targets, for higher education institutions and Partnerships?

### **People Entering Higher Education from a Care Background**

Recommendations 12 – 16 focus on working with young people entering higher education with a care background. In your view:

- xi. Are recommendations 12 – 16 reasonable and practical for all HEIs?
- xii. For students from a care background, how might the sector (a) further raise awareness of higher education opportunities and (b) improve the range and level of support available for students from a care background to enable them to succeed in higher education?

### **Additional Consultation Responses**

- 15. We have recently established the Widening Access Committee to advise us on widening access and Reaching Wider policy areas. We would welcome any additional views on the evaluation report. All consultation responses will inform the Widening Access Committee's deliberations and our final advice to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

### **RESPONSES TO THIS CIRCULAR**

- 16. **Annex D** incorporates the consultation questions above and may be used as a template for responses. The template asks respondents to state whether the views expressed are individual or institutional views.
- 17. As noted above, consultation responses should be received by us, either via email or post, by **Friday 20 April 2007**. Please reply to Emma King ([emma.king@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:emma.king@hefcw.ac.uk)) at Linden Court, The Orchards, Ilex Close, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5DZ. If you require any further information please contact Emma on Tel: 029 2068 2201.

ANNEX A  
THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF  
THE WIDENING ACCESS FUNDED ACTIVITIES AND  
THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg  
Uwch Cymru  
Higher Education Funding  
Council for Wales

hefcw

**Evaluation of the widening access activities and the  
Reaching Wider Initiative in Welsh Higher Education  
Institutions**

*Final Report  
January 2007*



Enterprise House, 126 Bute Street  
Cardiff Bay, CF10 5LE (029 2044 0552)

[www.aradconsulting.com](http://www.aradconsulting.com)

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## **Executive Summary**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This executive summary presents the findings of the evaluation of widening access activities in Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the Reaching Wider initiative. The study was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) in response to the Welsh Assembly Government's request to undertake a sector-wide review of activities aimed at widening access to higher education. It also examines levels of alignment and complementarity between institutional widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.

#### **1.1 Aims of the Evaluation**

The specific aims of the study were defined as follows:

- ❑ To investigate the development, progress and impact of both the widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.
- ❑ To consider whether, and if so what, changes should be introduced at national level, at sector-wide level and / or through the Reaching Wider Partnerships, to ensure that progress can be made towards opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society.

#### **1.2 Evaluation Methodology**

The evaluation was undertaken between September and December 2006. It was agreed that the evaluation methodology should be designed so as to allow for equal attention to be given to the two elements of the study. The evaluators collected evidence separately in relation to i) institutional widening access activities and, ii) the Reaching Wider initiative. This process involved desk research, a survey of HE institutions and stakeholder organisations and face-to-face interviews, also with institutional representatives and other interested parties.

### **2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO THE EVALUATION**

#### **2.1 Widening Access**

The first Widening Access Strategies, in their current format, were submitted by HEIs in February 2001. HEFCW encourages HEIs to develop strategies that take account of their individual missions and circumstances and complement overall institutional strategic plans.

HEFCW requires institutions to submit widening access strategies on a triennial basis. The last complete three-year strategy cycle was for the period 2002/03 to 2004/05, and was subsequently extended to cover 2005/06. During the course of this evaluation, institutions have submitted new strategies for the period 2006/07 to 2008/09, which have a greater focus on the four Reaching Wider target groups. Guidance issued by HEFCW notes that new institutional widening access strategies should identify:

- how the institution's widening access mission fits into the institution's overall mission;
- progress to date in meeting institutional targets;
- short and medium term plans and priorities.

## **2.2 The Reaching Wider Initiative**

The Reaching Wider initiative was established with a remit to drive progress towards the attainment of the four *Reaching Higher* widening access target groups. Following the publication of *Reaching Higher*, the Welsh Assembly Government announced an additional £2m available in 2002/03 to establish regional partnerships to drive forward the widening access activities in a regionally coordinated manner. Subsequently four regional Partnerships submitted funding proposals (North Wales, West and Mid Wales, South West Wales and South East Wales). As well as representatives from HEIs the Partnerships include senior representatives from further education and schools and some also include community and voluntary organisations, local education authorities and Careers Wales. Allocations of approximately £2m each year have been made from 2003/04 to the present.

## **3 EVALUATION OF WIDENING ACCESS ACTIVITIES**

Widening access to higher education is a key priority for the Welsh Assembly Government and is consistent with other attempts to promote equal opportunities and equality of access to educational opportunities. However attempts to develop a universally agreed definition of widening access activities are problematic as the range and nature of widening access cohorts vary widely. This issue is further clouded by the fact that institutions develop widening access provision in response to particular regional socio-economic needs, within the context of their individual institutional missions and strategies. These factors need to be taken into consideration when measuring and evaluating widening access progress and impact achieved across the higher education sector.

### **3.1 Institutional Strategies**

Institutional strategies relating to Widening Access vary widely across the sector, largely due to the complexities of defining widening access cohorts and the need to respond to needs on the basis noted above. They range from the specific targeting of

groups to the development of partnerships both within the local community and Wales-wide as well as the incorporation of widening access as a central element of the overall strategic mission of the institution.

The majority of institutions listed recruitment and admissions, followed closely by learning and teaching, as aspects of their institutional planning directly linked to their widening access strategy. Examples of linkages between learning and teaching and widening access included outreach work, with specific learning opportunities and modules designed to cater for the needs of off-campus learners. In addition, institutions stated that staff development also linked into their widening access strategies and activities. Examples of staff development largely involved awareness-raising relating to equality issues and the needs of disabled students.

### **3.2 Implementing Widening Access Strategies**

Most institutions reported that the focus of their widening access strategy and activities were targeted equally across all departments and faculties across the institution, with many also reporting that all departments were responsible for delivering and monitoring their own widening access activities. HEIs have generally adopted either a devolved model or a more centralised approach to developing widening access strategies. A centralised approach can work equally well within institutions that have a strong commitment to widening access across all departments as it does within those that do not. However, a devolved implementation approach does offer the opportunity to encourage greater ownership and buy-in across departments in situations where increased staff commitment to widening access is required.

### **3.3 Student Support and Retention**

The majority of institutions reported that, in working towards their widening access strategy objectives, they offered a range of student support services including an institution-wide student support officer, a network of student support staff, drop-in centres and support sessions, either on a one-to-one or group basis and study skills advice. Many of these student support activities are funded through widening access premium allocations, although the provision is available to all students. In almost all cases, however, it was reported that the majority of students who access these student support services are from low participation backgrounds. From the evidence presented by HEIs during the course of this evaluation it would appear that successful interventions have been informed by institutional analysis of its own student data on non-completion and audits into the primary causes of non-completion.

### **3.4 Providing Effective Support**

Most institutions were of the opinion that activities that provide intensive support to small targeted groups offer the most effective widening access support. It was generally considered that this is the most effective way of engaging 'hard to reach' groups and that individuals within certain groups, such as those with disabilities and those leaving care, may require further intensive support. It does appear that activities which are most tailored to the specific needs of target groups, and therefore avoid a blanket approach, seem to be held in the highest esteem by both practitioners and beneficiaries.

### **3.5 Targeting and Monitoring Widening Access Activities**

In general HEIs set their own targets in relation to recognising and prioritising widening access target groups. These target groups are influenced by their own recruitment patterns, their regional and national catchment areas, Welsh Assembly Government targets, UK-wide performance indicators, national priorities and legal requirements. In relation to data sources and institutional analysis that have informed widening access strategy development, most institutions cited the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation as a key dataset, particularly in relation to activities targeting Communities First areas. The majority of survey respondents also noted that widening access work has been informed by the analysis of their own student cohorts.

### **3.6 Impact and Added Value**

Although some evidence illustrating outcomes and impact was presented during the course of this evaluation it is clear that some HEIs are able to measure the impact of their widening access provision more robustly than others. Relatively little data or records of participation rates (beyond anecdotal evidence) relating to individual activities aimed at widening access was presented during the course of the evaluation. This lack of robust evidence concurs with similar higher education sector research and evaluation findings produced in England. Given that there is currently no consistent widening access monitoring and impact assessment process across the HE sector in Wales, as is the case with other UK regions, it is difficult to confidently report on the medium to long-term impact of widening access activities in a consistent manner across the sector.

## **4 EVALUATION OF THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE**

Reaching Wider Partnerships are required to develop and deliver collaborative targeted widening access provision to raise the aspirations and educational skills of the four all-age widening access groups identified in *Reaching Higher*. While it was

considered that individual institutions will continue to be the drivers in terms of widening access on a sector-wide basis there was general agreement that continuing collaboration in terms of the four target groups and delivery through Partnerships should remain, as this structure adds value to current provision. It is clear that HEIs are well placed to drive forward the Partnerships' priorities, although other partners clearly play an important role in planning, developing and implementing initiatives.

#### **4.1 Reaching Wider and Prioritising Target Groups**

According to evidence presented to the evaluators, focusing Reaching Wider resources on a relatively narrow set of groups is considered to be the most appropriate basis upon which to operate on a Partnership level. Channelling, what were seen as, limited resources on a narrow set of target groups would, in the opinion of those consulted, have a greater impact than would be the case if they were spread more thinly over a much broader strategic focus. There was however some disagreement regarding the suitability of some of the groups and there were some calls that individual Partnerships should be allowed to determine which groups should be targeted in order to reflect local needs to a greater extent.

#### **4.2 Effectiveness of the Partnerships**

Institutions were almost all strongly supportive of the regional nature of the Reaching Wider initiative and many considered themselves to be enthusiastic and active supporters of the regional concept and believed it was the most effective way of meeting the needs of all target groups. The effectiveness of the Partnerships is also reflected in the range of activities which they provide. Examples include aspiration and awareness raising activities to school pupils where the contributions of the HEIs within the Partnerships have enabled a diverse range of study areas and student experiences to be delivered to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Partnerships have also promoted a high level of buy-in from HEIs, FE colleges and other participating groups, encouraging commitment to sharing practices engendering a collaborative approach to working. In addition, the absence of short-term competitive recruitment pressures enables them to consider the longer term needs of learners, for example skills development, motivation and educational aspiration-raising, and not only the 'quick fix' solutions that will increase short term enrolment levels.

#### **4.3 Funding Reaching Wider**

The fact that Reaching Wider funding has been, until recently, allocated on an annual basis was highlighted as a key issue facing all Partnerships. This, it was reported, has served to create uncertainty among those employed by the Partnerships. Concerns were also raised as to the degree to which short term funding can lead to

risk aversion, particularly in relation to adopting innovative approaches and developing new areas of activity. From 2006/07 some progress has been made with the allocation of two year funding to 2008/9 with HEFCW and the Assembly working towards rolling funding allocations.

#### **4.4 Impact and Added Value**

Many of the activities supported by the Reaching Wider initiative have been focused around raising awareness, as well as raising skills levels, among younger age cohorts and community groups who are some way off accessing higher education in the immediate future. The Reaching Wider Partnerships assess activities through a series of assessments and measures, both 'hard' and 'soft'. Soft measures include awareness raising, capacity building, community links and the development of trust. Hard measures include progression through the educational systems and costs/numbers of students. These measures are used to ensure the Partnerships are adding value and avoiding duplication and are overseen through the Partnership committees.

Many institutions noted that the additional funding provided through Reaching Wider has enabled the development of a range of new activities aimed at the target groups. To support this claim, positive progress has been made in relation to the number of individuals accessing higher education across all four target groups. The degree to which Partnerships have avoided unnecessary duplication of activities was also considered to be an example of added value. This, it was claimed, was a result of good communications between partners and joint coordination of activities. However it was suggested by a number of institutions that there needs to be more of a focus of potential collaborative work and dissemination of results across the whole of Wales.

### **5 PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS**

Proportional increases in higher education enrolment are being recorded across the four target groups in each of the Partnership regions, although proportional enrolment increases for Communities First areas are forecast to plateau off during the run up to 2010. Responsibility for achieving Reaching Wider targets is not the sole responsibility of Reaching Wider Partnerships. However, if Partnerships are to be motivated to continue to contribute to the positive progress currently being made, then there is a need to expand the focus of the target period beyond 2010 and support this with longer term funding proposals.

### **6 COMPLEMENTARITY AND ALIGNMENT**

Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs have achieved alignment between Reaching Wider and Widening Access by ensuring that activities supported by the two funding sources do not duplicate efforts targeted at similar groups. This is

particularly evident from examples where Reaching Wider Initiatives have focused on younger age cohorts, mostly under 16, while widening access activities have supported older age groups, particularly those that are closest to accessing higher education.

## **7 YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION FROM A CARE BACKGROUND**

It was unanimously agreed across all institutions that addressing the barriers to higher education faced by individuals leaving care should be given a high priority. However none of the HEIs have, to date, developed a comprehensive policy relating to young people leaving care and there was widespread acknowledgement that any policies would require wide multi-agency and cross-sector partnership approaches. A number of institutions noted that the development of such a policy is now being considered and some noted this as a priority area within their 2006/2009 widening access strategy. Some institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships have already taken some initial steps to create linkages with appropriate organisations and in so doing have encountered some early challenges particularly in relation to engaging with relevant individuals.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

### Widening Access activities

#### Recommendation 1

Systematic monitoring and tracking of beneficiaries should be an integral part of institutions' widening access strategies. Monitoring and tracking can assist individual institutions in informing the development of future activities, by helping to identify those activities that have had a positive impact on participation among under-represented groups.

**Lead:** HEIs.

#### Recommendation 2

HEFCW should work closely with HESA and the Welsh Assembly Government in keeping informed of current developments under the *Managing Information Across Partners* (MIAP) programme which is being led by DfES and partners. In the longer term the outcomes of this programme should inform HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government in developing the most appropriate approach to ensure consistency and alignment of different sources of information in Wales. This could identify how to overcome any current barriers to understanding the progression routes of statutory school-age pupils through post-16 education and training and on to higher education.

**Lead:** Welsh Assembly Government jointly with HEFCW and HESA

#### Recommendation 3

HEIs should be encouraged to conduct their own detailed monitoring into the causes of non-completion as a means of informing innovative approaches to student support. Generic findings from current audits carried out by individual institutions should be shared across the sector, possibly through the newly established Widening Access Committee.

**Lead:** HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

#### Recommendation 4

Individual institutions have developed a number of widening access strategy development and funding allocation models. The Widening Access Committee (WAC) should consider, and make recommendations to HEFCW, on how best to disseminate information relating to the merits of each of these models to enable institutions to adopt the one that is most suitable and favourable to them. The WAC

should also consider ways of optimising the degree of funding accountability demonstrated by HEIs for their widening access activities.

**Lead:** HEFCW / Widening Access Committee\*

#### **Recommendation 5**

Institutions may want to ensure that widening access strategies include internal monitoring and evaluation systems which enable them to assess the effects and impacts of their activities. Building on progress to date, effective monitoring activities could capture both quantitative data on progression rates, but also qualitative outcomes related to attitudes and perceptions and nurturing trust with under-represented communities.

**Lead:** All HE Institutions

### **Reaching Wider Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 6**

In light of calls from Partnerships for greater autonomy to focus on target areas that reflect local needs all Reaching Wider Partnerships should first of all reconfirm their commitment to meeting all Reaching Higher widening access targets. However, Partnerships should also be offered the flexibility to prioritise their targeted activities through discussions with HEFCW. This would enable Partnerships to focus on areas of activity which are most likely to result in greater impacts. The National Coordinator should, therefore, work with Partnerships to identify their specific strengths in relation to the targets, and how these can best serve the needs of their regions.

**Lead:** Reaching Wider National Coordinator and Chairs of Reaching Wider Partnerships

#### **Recommendation 7**

HEFCW should review the configuration of the Partnerships, including the suitability of the current regional structure of Partnerships, in more depth to identify approaches that offer the most effective contributions to the Reaching Higher widening access targets.

**Lead:** HEFCW

## Funding

### Recommendation 8

The Welsh Assembly Government should consider releasing Reaching Wider funding into HEFCW's mainstream budget to 2010 to enable the Funding Council to have greater control over the management and flow of funding. Failing this the Welsh Assembly Government should at least confirm that Reaching Wider funding will be available to 2010.

**Lead:** Welsh Assembly Government

### Recommendation 9

Should funding for Reaching Wider Partnerships be extended beyond 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW should consider providing longer term funding, possibly allocating funds on a rolling three-year basis.

**Lead:** Welsh Assembly Government

## Cross-cutting recommendations

### Recommendation 10

Examples of good practice should be identified and disseminated more widely across the sector. The HEFCW coordinated Reaching Wider national conference and the Widening Access Committee should be the main forums for this dissemination.

**Lead:** HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

### Recommendation 11

Both Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual institutions should take steps to address the all-age remit of the Reaching Higher widening access targets and ensure that adult learners, including those already in employment are targeted more pro-actively through a range of widening access activities.

**Lead:** Reaching Wider Partnerships and HEIs

## **Recommendations relating to young people entering higher education from a care background**

### **Recommendation 12**

All higher education institutions in Wales should actively consider adopting the 'Going to University from Care' recommendations outlined by the Frank Buttle Trust.

**Lead:** All HE institutions

### **Recommendation 13**

Further research, reviews and dissemination of good practice nationally and internationally is required in order to gain an understanding of how multi-agency partnerships can be formed to work collaboratively to address the needs of young people entering HE from a care background.

**Lead:** Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs

### **Recommendation 14**

Further awareness raising and staff development is also required across all higher and further education institutions and colleges across Wales in order to ensure that staff are aware of the specific needs of people from a background of care and equipped with the knowledge and skills to address them.

**Lead:** HEFCW & individual HEI/FEI

### **Recommendation 15**

Institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships should work with relevant regional and national care agencies to ensure that optimum support is offered to students and that this support is consistent both during and outside term-time. Furthermore, efforts should be taken to ensure that relevant agencies continue to offer equivalent support to students from a care background.

**Lead:** HEIs and Reaching Wider Partnerships

### **Recommendation 16**

HEIs, and FEIs providing higher education, should raise awareness of and support students with a care background to obtain the range of additional support available and introduce systems that record and monitor information on this cohort of students.

**Lead:** HEIs

## **THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF WIDENING ACCESS FUNDED ACTIVITIES AND THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE**

### **EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **Evaluation Aims**

1. HEFCW wishes to commission an evaluation of widening access funded activity, and the Reaching Wider initiative, to ensure that future policy development, and the January 2007 report to the Assembly, is underpinned by robust and objective information.
2. The aims of this evaluation are to:
  - Investigate the development, progress and impact of both the widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.
  - Consider whether, and if so what changes should be introduced at national level, at sector-wide and/or through the Partnerships, to ensure that progress can be made towards opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society.

#### **Evaluation Objectives**

3. The tender is for a study that will evaluate widening access funded activity and the Reaching Wider initiative.
4. The evaluation objective is to evaluate the development, progress and impact of widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.
  - a) Within this, for widening access funded activity, to consider:
    - a) evidence of institutions' widening access activities increasing participation in higher education, including to young people having been in care;
    - b) the extent to which widening access and RW activities are aligned, avoid duplication and jointly provide a continuum of learning opportunities for widening access cohorts;
    - c) the equality of opportunity provided by widening access activities evidenced by the impact on groups under-represented in higher education. (Welsh speakers and young people having been in care should also be considered.);
    - d) the good practice and key strengths of widening access activities and also the constraints/weaknesses;
    - e) whether strategic changes are required, at widening access national or regional level to ensure that the sector continues to make progress towards progressively opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society.

And for the Reaching Wider to consider:

- a) evidence of the Reaching Wider initiative in making progress towards the sector-wide *RH* widening access targets;
- b) the 'additionality' the RW initiative provides to the HE sector, through an assessment of the difference regional collaborative work makes, over and above the impact of other HEI widening access interventions and policies;
- c) the equality of opportunity provided by Reaching Wider activities evidenced by the impact on the Reaching Higher widening access target groups;
- d) the good practice and key strengths of the RW initiative and also the constraints/weaknesses;
- e) whether, and if so what, strategic changes are required at Partnership level to ensure that the sector achieves the *Reaching Higher* widening access targets;

**THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF WIDENING ACCESS FUNDED ACTIVITIES AND  
THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE**

**THE CONSULTATION SCHEDULE**

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>DATE</b>
The consultation circular and executive summary is distributed to all HEIs and FEIs.	28 February 2007
Arad Consulting will undertake further actions to support the consultation process including discussing the evaluation findings with key stakeholders.	28 February 2007
Sector-wide consultation on the report.	28 February to 20 April 2007
The full evaluation report is available on the HEFCW website.	5 March 2007
Reaching Wider National Conference – A seminar at the conference will provide conference delegates with the opportunity to discuss and comment on the evaluation report and findings. Arad Consulting staff will attend the conference.	5 March 2007
HEFCW's Widening Access Committee (WAC) will receive an interim report from Arad Consulting. The WAC will discuss the evaluation report findings and the interim consultation outcomes.	20 March 2007
The Widening Access Committee will receive a final report from Arad Consulting on the consultation outcomes and recommendations.	12 June 2007
HEFCW will submit a final report to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. The report will include the consultation outcomes, the Widening Access Committee recommendations and our advice on further widening access policy actions.	30 June 2007

**NATIONAL EVALUATION OF WIDENING ACCESS FUNDED ACTIVITIES AND THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE****Consultation Response Form****Institution:**

Drawing on the conclusions and recommendations set out in evaluation report, the main issues on which we would welcome views are as follows:

**WIDENING ACCESS ACTIVITIES**

Recommendations 1 – 5 focus on widening access funded activities. In your view:

**i. Do the findings provide an accurate assessment of widening access funded activities across the Welsh higher education sector? If not, why not?**

**ii. Do the findings on widening access activities focus on key widening access issues? (The issues considered include monitoring and tracking, retention and non-completion, institutional funding models, evaluation processes to demonstrate impact.) If, in your opinion, other key issues should be considered please provide more information with examples or evidence to support this view.**

**iii. In what ways might higher education institutions benefit from an understanding of other institutions' widening access funding models?**

**iv. The evaluation found limited evidence to demonstrate the impact of widening access funded activities. Can further, robust quantitative and/or qualitative data be provided to demonstrate the impact of widening access activities?**

**v. Tracking and monitoring of widening access cohorts provides evidence of successful progression through higher education. How could tracking and monitoring processes be improved (a) within and between Reaching Wider activities (b) within your institution (c) between institutions and partners**

**and (d) Wales-wide? Are there examples of good practice in tracking and monitoring that you would be willing to share?**

- vi. **What other factors, policy areas or initiatives should the Widening Access Committee consider when advising the Welsh Assembly Government on future widening access policy developments?**

#### **THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE**

Recommendations 6 -9 focus on the Reaching Wider Initiative. In your view:

- vii. **Do the findings provide an accurate assessment of the Reaching Wider Initiative? If not, why not?**

- viii. **Do the findings focus on the key issues for Reaching Wider (ie the Partnerships' effectiveness, structure, and the Initiative's funding)? If, in your opinion, other key issues should be considered please provide more information with examples or evidence to support this view.**

#### **CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

Recommendations 10 – 11 comment on cross-cutting themes which impact on both widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative. In your view:

- ix. **In the light of the report's findings on impact and outcomes, how should examples of good practice be evidenced and disseminated?**

- x. **If recommendation 11, on targeting of adult learners is accepted, how might Partnerships and HEIs address this recommendation in the short- and medium term? What might be the implications for the Reaching Higher targets, for higher education institutions and Partnerships?**

#### **PEOPLE ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION FROM A CARE BACKGROUND**

Recommendations 12 – 16 focus on working with young people entering higher education with a care background. In your view:

- xi. **Are recommendations 12 – 16 reasonable and practical for all HEIs?**

xii. For students from a care background, how might the sector (a) further raise awareness of higher education opportunities and (b) improve the range and level of support available for students from a care background to enable them to succeed in higher education?

#### ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION RESPONSES

We would welcome any additional views on the evaluation report. All consultation responses will inform the Widening Access Committee's deliberations and our final advice to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

We would welcome responses from individuals and institutions. Please confirm whether this response is an individual response or an institutional response.

This response is an individual/institutional\* response

Name:

Position:

Date:

*\*Please delete the option that does not apply.*

#### SUBMISSION DATE FOR RESPONSES

Responses to this consultation should be received by email or post, by **Friday 20 April 2007**. The consultation form is available on the HEFCW website, please see the 'Publications section' choose the 'Consultations' link.

Please return responses to reply to Emma King ([emma.king@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:emma.king@hefcw.ac.uk)) at Linden Court, The Orchards, Ilex Close, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5DZ.

If you require any further information, please contact Emma on Tel: 029 2068 2201.