

DEVELOPING A REGIONAL DIMENSION TO THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

CONSULTATION OUTCOME

- 1 Responses to the consultation were received from ten higher education institutions (including one response from two institutions in the process of merger); four further education colleges; four on behalf of Sector Skills Councils; two from sector representative bodies; two from higher education trades unions; two from pan-Wales units within higher education; one UK agency and one from Assembly Government agencies.
- 2 An assessment of the responses to the three questions and their potential impact on the HEFCW proposals is provided below:

Question 1: Do you support the definition of “region” which we are adopting? If not, please set out your alternative proposal and the evidence for this.

Proposals

- 3 The HEFCW consultation document proposed that we should work on the basis of three regions, defined as follows in terms of higher education institutions:
 - South-East Wales, covering Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff and University of Wales, Newport;
 - South-West Wales, covering Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan University, Trinity University College, Carmarthen and University of Wales, Lampeter;
 - Mid and North Wales, covering Aberystwyth University, Bangor University and Glyndŵr University.
- 4 In each of these geographical areas it was intended that HEFCW would work with both higher education (including the Open University in each region), further education and post-16 providers to develop progression routes through to higher education. Each of the regions would also need to take account of the pan Wales Coleg Ffederal, as it develops, with some institutions possibly also being involved, where it makes sense, in regions outside that to which they are attached.

Summary of responses

- 5 In general, the HEIs and FE colleges were broadly in agreement with the proposed regions. However, some specific concerns were raised in relation to the Mid and North Wales region, with some institutions considering that, in part due to travel distances and poor transport links, a separate North East region (or sub-region) should be considered aligned to the North East Wales Spatial Plan region. Additionally, in view of the ease of communications along

the M4 corridor, the two universities questioned the value of dividing South Wales into South East and South West Wales regions.

- 6 Several responses emphasised that it would be crucial that institutions were not constrained to operation in a single region. For example, cases were made that two universities should have roles in both the South West Wales and Mid and North Wales regions. It was also widely highlighted in the responses that regional planning and delivery structures would need to be flexible enough to allow cross-regional delivery and pan-Wales roles for some institutions in specific subject areas. For example, as a sole provider in a range of subject areas, one university requested that these subject areas might either be removed from regional planning or that the university might be represented in all the regional planning structures. A further specific concern was raised regarding the organisational capacity of the Open University in Wales to deliver the resources necessary to have a significant involvement in all three regions.

Question 2: Do you support the way in which we expect regional “need” to be identified? If not, are there other factors which should be taken into account?

Proposals

- 7 The HEFCW consultation document proposed that further work would be undertaken to establish an evidence base, taking account of issues or other factors identified in the consultation. This would help HEFCW to identify areas of regional need and better define measurable regional boundaries.
- 8 In order to implement any new arrangements by 2011/12, it was planned that HEFCW invite providers to collaborate to commence the work of identifying need at a local and regional level in Wales, using available quantitative and qualitative information and consulting with local stakeholders, including employers, within the region. This would inform HEFCW’s consideration of any future adjustments to the funding of provision on a regional basis, supported by the quantitative and qualitative evidence base as it develops.

Summary of responses

- 9 The majority of HEIs and FE colleges were broadly supportive of the proposed approach for the identification of regional need. However, a number of specific points were raised, including a requirement to identify long-term needs rather than just short-term student demand, taking account of factors such as: WAG priority sectors; employer requirements and Sector Skills Councils’ analysis of workforce needs; and latent need in communities with low participation rates. Other points raised included: the impact of English institutions operating close to the border; students’ preferred location of study; and the availability of public transport and ICT infrastructure in rural areas. A particular issue highlighted by the FE sector was that analysis of need should take account of accessibility for those students more likely to engage in HE through an FE college in the first instance. It was noted separately that local,

regional and national linguistic needs will also need to be taken into account when identifying priorities.

- 10 More general concerns were also raised in a number of responses, with two responses suggesting that HEFCW seek expert advice on determining regional need prior to proceeding. In addition, one university suggested that HEFCW undertake further analysis of the share of students from deprived areas participating in each of the regions, prior to proceeding. Concerns were also expressed by institutions that the approach concentrated too much on supply, as opposed to demand, and that HEFCW should not play a direct role in analysing need, but rather support the institutions in undertaking the analysis.

Question 3: Do you support the way in which we plan to take forward the planning and delivery of higher education through the use of regional strategies? If not, are there any amendments which you would wish to suggest or do you have an alternative approach to recommend?

Proposals

- 11 The HEFCW consultation document proposed that all higher education providers (HEIs and FE colleges) should be invited to collaborate in preparing a regional strategy for all modes of HE provision in their region, with the Open University to be involved in each of the three regions. The strategies would look across widening access, learning and teaching (including Welsh medium) and third mission policy areas. The strategies would also be expected to address possible collaborative approaches to capital investment and shared services.
- 12 Using available sources of data and following liaison with local stakeholders (local authorities, post-16 providers, employers, schools, etc), it was proposed that the regional strategies:
- Identify the need for higher education provision in the defined region, covering size and type of provision, subject breakdown, mode of study available, etc, taking into account the type of factors listed above;
 - Summarise the outcome of an audit of HE provision in the region across all providers, including the Open University;
 - Identify any new provision required in the region (type, subject, level, mode), for which there is clear market demand, together with a summary of market evidence, and how this could be developed;
 - Summarise the outcome of an audit of local progression routes and opportunities from CQFW level 3 and work-based provision (including apprenticeships) into HE provision, following liaison with the relevant stakeholders;
 - Identify areas of duplication together with plans to work together to minimise nugatory local competition and wasteful duplication;

- Show how the partners would work with employers and Sector Skills Councils, as appropriate, to identify where joint working could help to meet regional skills needs;
 - Identify collaborative capital developments and shared services which can support the regional strategy;
 - Take account of the Welsh language and the need for Welsh medium provision, including the role of the Coleg Ffederal, as it develops;
 - Detail the ongoing and formal liaison arrangements put in place to facilitate the regional collaboration; and
 - Provide an assessment of the equality and diversity impact of the proposals put forward in the regional strategy.
- 13 It was intended that some elements of HEFCW funding would support the regional strategies. The regional dimension would feed into the review of HEFCW Funding Methodologies which would be conducted in the light of 'For our Future'. Funding would come initially from the following sources:
- Efficiencies generated by partnership working, especially where, through redistribution of activity, these generate economies of scale;
 - Funded credits generated by top-slicing from those currently available, as part of the strategic use of core funding;
 - Subject to further policy development with the Welsh Assembly Government, potential credits associated with partnership delivered Foundation Degrees, within the evolving WAG priority for Foundation Degrees and funded from monies released as a result of the Jones' Review of Higher Education in Wales; and
 - Regional allocations of funding to support specific strategies (eg, Third Mission, ITT).
- 14 HEFCW would expect to allocate the funded credits, or any other form of funding, initially identified to support regional developments between the three regions on the basis of detailed proposals (including market evidence) assessed on a competitive basis against published criteria. Successful proposals would receive funded credits in 2011/12 which would be rolled-in in subsequent years.

Summary of responses

- 15 The responses have in the main not raised objections to the proposed approach to the planning and delivery of HE through regional strategies, although one university has expressed general reservations about a regional approach, arguing that this would be unlikely to deliver economies of scale. This university's response also argued that separate regional planning processes might result in nugatory competition between the regions, a point echoed by two FE colleges. Additionally, one institution considered that the proposed approach to regional planning and delivery would not provide the necessary framework unless a locally-based forum was established in each of the regions to better identify the needs of Wales. In assessing the needs of the three regions, Welsh medium provision was identified as a key issue to be included and it was pointed out that Welsh Language Schemes, as strategic policy documents, could provide assistance in this task.

- 16 Particular concerns were raised in respect of the top-slicing of credits to support regional developments, with one institution suggesting that incentivising regional developments through new funds would be a more effective approach. One university also raised a concern that early top-slicing of credits might reduce provision in priority subjects (e.g. modern foreign languages and STEM) until the impact of the new regional strategies worked through. This university also noted that the details of any top-slicing would need to be finalised by October 2010 in order to inform the offers and intake targets for September 2011.
- 17 Specific concerns were also raised regarding the proposed timescale for the development of regional strategies, with a longer timescale being considered necessary to allow constructive dialogue between institutions.
- 18 Points were also raised by one university in respect of the exclusion of certain high-cost and niche subjects from regional planning and by the Sector Skills Councils in relation to the need to consider national and sector priorities, together with regional requirements.