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Cylchlythyr

Circular

## HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education

**Date:** 22 October 2010  
**Reference:** W10/36HE  
**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in  
Wales and other interested parties  
**Response by:** **Monday 22 November 2010**  
**Contact:** Name: Jane Johns  
Telephone: 029 2068 2219  
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This circular seeks the involvement of Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Institutions and other parties with an interest in equality and diversity issues in the further development of HEFCW's *Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education*.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2225 or email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).

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Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
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## Introduction

1. This circular seeks the involvement of Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Institutions and other parties with an interest in equality and diversity issues in the further development of HEFCW's *Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education*.
2. This stage of the policy development process is particularly focused on issues of equality and diversity.
3. For brevity, we will refer to *HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* as the *Approach*.
4. The *Approach* is attached as **Annex A**. We are publishing the **Approach** as a working document to enable us to publish it in October and thus maximise the consultation period.

## About HEFCW and its Commitment to Equality and Diversity

5. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) is an Assembly Sponsored Government Body (ASGB). We are supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and others to use funding strategically to enable universities and colleges to deliver high quality teaching, learning and research in universities and colleges and to ensure that universities and colleges contribute effectively to the culture, society and economy of Wales.<sup>1</sup>
6. In relation to equality and diversity issues, HEFCW's Equality Scheme (2008-2010) confirms our commitment and statutory responsibilities regarding the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act, the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act and the 2006 Equality Act <sup>2</sup>(recently superseded by the 2010 Equality Act). However, our strategic intentions extend beyond compliance. To further inform our understanding of the nature of, and trends in, under-representation, we work with Universities and Colleges in Wales and other relevant bodies to ensure that our policies and practices take account of the needs of groups under-represented in higher education, including individuals with protected characteristics. We support higher education institutions to protect and respect the rights of all groups in society and to be fair and transparent in their treatment of applicants and student groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about HEFCW can be found at: [www.hefcw.ac.uk](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [www.hefcw.ac.uk/about\\_us/equality\\_and\\_diversity\\_in\\_hefcw/equality\\_diversity\\_reports.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/about_us/equality_and_diversity_in_hefcw/equality_diversity_reports.aspx)

## Background

7. Our *Approach* explains the background and context to its development, including the Welsh Assembly's publication, in November 2009, of its strategy for higher education: *For our Future: the Twenty-First Century Strategy and Plan for Higher Education*<sup>3</sup> and our Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13 response to *For Our Future*.<sup>4</sup>
8. In the *Approach* we use the term 'widening access to and through higher education' to define our strategic intentions and encompass our strategic objectives. Our strategic objectives are to:
  - i. Prioritise recruitment from Communities First areas;
  - ii. Improve access for groups traditionally under-represented in higher education;
  - iii. Prioritise student learning and success and retention;
  - iv. Support fair access to the professions, higher level skills and the priority sectors
  - v. Encourage flexible learning opportunities, including part-time;
  - vi. Secure clear articulation and progression pathways into higher education;
  - vii. Maximise the potential for collaborative, cross-sectoral, multi-agency approaches;
  - viii. Deploy resources to deliver our widening access objectives;
  - ix. Apply a regional framework to target widening access more effectively;
  - x. Improve the evidence base to support widening access and impact assessment.
9. Our *Approach* sits beneath our Corporate Strategy, providing a fuller picture of our widening access strategic objectives and initial actions. Its purpose is to promote a clear understanding of widening access policy and practice in Wales. Our intentions in setting out our *Approach* are to be: challenging in our aspirations; clear in our agenda for action; realistic in managing expectations; and transparent in providing a mechanism for measuring progress and demonstrating success.

## Policy Development and Timelines

10. HEFCW's draft *Approach* has been developed in consultation with our Council, its Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee (SETQC) and the SETQC Widening Access Task and Finish Group. We have also

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<sup>3</sup> [www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125hedocen.pdf](http://www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125hedocen.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate\\_documents/corporate\\_strategy.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_strategy.aspx)

discussed the draft *Approach* with a number of individuals and organisations as it has been developed. **Appendix A** of the *Approach* lists the membership of the above groups.

11. Given the extent of the consultation we have already undertaken in relation to our strategic priorities and initial actions, we are confident that our *Approach* will deliver the *For Our Future* widening access-related expectations relevant to delivering social justice and supporting a buoyant economy.
12. As part of our policy development process, we have undertaken an internal equality impact assessment process to consider the impact on individuals with protected characteristics and groups under-represented in higher education. While no issues of concern were raised, given the significance of this policy document, the panel recommended that we invite wider involvement in the development of our *Approach*.
13. In response to the panel's suggestion, in this stage of the consultation we want to focus specifically on the equality and diversity implications of *our Approach* to ensure that there is no negative impact on, nor unintended consequences to, individuals with protected characteristics or groups under-represented in higher education in the implementation of this policy.
14. Following this consultation, we will revise the *Approach* to take account of the feedback received. The final version our *Approach*, will be published in **December 2010** following its re-submission to our Council and SETQC.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications of our *Approach***

15. In responding to this consultation circular we would particularly welcome your views on the extent to which:
  - i. our proposed strategic objectives, priorities and initial actions promote our aims of ensuring equity, opportunity and success in higher education to enable learners of all ages and backgrounds who face the highest social and economic barriers to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners and citizens;
  - ii. our *Approach* references the new equality and diversity legal framework and promotes and encourages best practice<sup>5</sup>;
  - iii. our *Approach* will encourage cultural change and proactive approaches to ensure that equity and diversity issues are fully integrated into our own and the sector's policies and priorities.

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/equality/equalityact2010/?lang=en>

## **Responses to/Further Information**

16. Responses should be sent to [Rachel.OGorman@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:Rachel.OGorman@hefcw.ac.uk) by **Monday 22 November 2010**.
17. For further information, or discussion of the issues, contact Jane Johns (tel 029 2068 2219; email [Jane.Johns@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.Johns@hefcw.ac.uk)).