

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales

Cwrt Linden
Clos Ilex Llanisien
Caerdydd CF14 5DZ
Ffôn 029 2076 1861
Ffacs 029 2076 3163
www.hefcw.ac.uk

Linden Court
Ilex Close Llanishen
Cardiff CF14 5DZ
Tel 029 2076 1861
Fax 029 2076 3163
www.hefcw.ac.uk

hefcw

Cylchlythyr

Circular

Reaching Wider Strategies 2011/12 to 2013/14

Date: 06 January 2011
Reference: W11/01HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales;
Principals of further education colleges in Wales.
Response by: 01 February 2011
Contact: Name: Jane Johns
Telephone: 029 2068 2219
Email: jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular provides initial guidance to Reaching Wider Partnerships on the submission of three-year strategies for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14 and it invites involvement in our equality impact assessment process.

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.

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Assembly Government



Introduction

1. This circular provides initial guidance to Reaching Wider (RW) Partnerships on the submission of three-year strategies for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14.
2. In this circular we are confirming our intention to move to three-year funded strategies from 2011/12 and to renew our approach to Partnership funding.
3. Further supplementary guidance and funding allocations for 2011/12 will be published in April 2011, subject to confirmation of HEFCW's budget by the Welsh Assembly Government.
4. As this guidance has implications for people with protected characteristics we would welcome views on the implications of this guidance for them, as outlined in the Equality and Diversity Implications section below.
5. We are also confirming funding for the period April 2011 to July 2011 to enable Reaching Wider Partnerships and their staff to effect a smooth transition to longer-term strategy funding.

Background

6. Reaching Wider Partnerships submitted funded proposals for 2010/11 and our May 2010 letter to Partnership Chairs confirmed the reasons why, at that time, we were unable to invite proposals of more than one year's duration.

Context

7. In this period, we are moving to funding the Reaching Wider Partnerships through strategy funding, rather than initiative funding to:
 - demonstrate our long-term commitment to the Reaching Wider Programme;
 - to enable the Reaching Wider Partnerships to contribute fully to the higher education regional strategies' planning and delivery of widening access;
 - encourage more strategic Reaching Wider interventions.
8. In this strategy period we expect that Reaching Wider Partnerships will be a key mechanism of the higher education regional strategies in delivering widening access across the regions.
9. To recognise the importance of Reaching Wider as one mechanism for delivering the widening access-related elements of *For our Future, the* Assembly Government strategy for Higher Education (HE), and Reaching Wider's move to strategy funding, from 2011/12 we will refer to the '**Reaching Wider Programme**', rather than the 'initiative'.

The Purpose of Strategies

10. We are inviting Reaching Wider strategies to enable us to:
 - understand Partnerships' strategic intentions in priority areas, including how they relate to their institutions' regional strategies;
 - understand clearly the basis on which we are supporting Reaching Wider strategic planning and delivery;
 - provide accountability for public funding through the setting and reporting on targets: funding may be held back or withdrawn if reporting is unsatisfactory;
 - provide the basis for strategic dialogues between HEFCW and the Partnerships by setting out Partnerships' key priorities and their responses to Assembly Government policies and priorities;
 - provide informed responses on the Reaching Wider Programme's progress and performance to the Assembly Government and other agencies.
11. We recognise that strategies are equally important to Partnerships to enable them to:
 - contribute to underpinning the high-level aims and objectives for these policy areas identified in our Corporate Strategy and *HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* and in institutions' regional planning;
 - enable them to plan strategically over a longer period than the former funded proposals;
 - be aspirational, clear on their agenda for action and direction of travel and transparent in articulating mechanisms for measuring progress and success;
 - identify, and ensure staff commitment to, the agreed strategic approach to contribute to driving cultural change and delivering improvement in the widening access policy area;
 - showcase their commitment and effective practice in relation to widening access.

Policy Context

12. The following strategic documents: *For Our Future: the 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*; HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13; and *HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* (known as our *Approach*) have set the strategic

context and widening access-related expectations for this new Reaching Wider Strategy period¹.

13. Our *Approach* identifies the following widening access strategic objectives in this period:
 - i. prioritise recruitment from Communities First areas;
 - ii. improve access for groups under-represented in higher education;
 - iii. prioritise student learning success and retention;
 - iv. support fair access to the professions, high 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.

14. Therefore, this guidance should be read in conjunction with:
 - i. HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 12-13²;
 - ii. Guidance for the Submission of Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of HE (see circular **W10/16HE**);
 - iii. Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education: Funding and Support (see circular **W10/28HE**);
 - iv. HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education (consultation) (see circular **W10/36HE**);
 - v. Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies 2011/12 to 2013/14: Initial Guidance (see circular **W10/41HE**)³;

15. We recognise that the Reaching Wider Partnerships cannot, and should not, deliver on all of these priorities set out in our *Approach*, but that they will want to be aware of our overall widening access strategic direction of travel and to work with partners and other partnerships to contribute appropriately.

16. In developing strategies, RW Partnerships will want to take account of the broader UK and Assembly Government strategic developments impacting on widening access which are identified in our *Approach*.

¹ The *HEFCW Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* has been published for consultation. The final version will be published in December 2010.

² For HEFCW's Corporate Strategy see:

http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_strategy.aspx

³ <http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars>

The Role of the Reaching Wider Programme

17. We have reviewed our approach to widening access, including the Reaching Wider initiative. We indicated our intention, in circular W10/06HE to move to three Partnerships to align with the higher education regional strategy areas and this was confirmed in our May circular W10/16HE. In addition to this structural change, we have reconsidered the specific role we would expect the Reaching Wider Programme to play in contributing to the *For our Future* priorities of social justice and supporting a buoyant economy. We consider that this role includes:

- becoming a key mechanism within higher education regional strategies for the delivery of widening access as set out in circular W10/16HE⁴;
- responding to regional needs and priorities as evidenced by local labour market intelligence and higher education regional strategies;
- responding flexibly to Welsh Assembly Government agenda related to social justice and supporting a buoyant economy;
- partnership working **with Further Education Colleges, Communities First Partnerships and other organisations** which is **multi-sectoral**, long-term, genuine and effective;
- working with **people of all ages from Communities First areas**. Within Communities First areas we anticipate that Partnerships would continue to include targeted activities to impact on:
 - i. **groups under-represented in higher education** including underachieving males; people from black and ethnic minority communities under-represented in higher education; and learners with protected characteristics⁵;
 - ii. **young people and young people/adults not yet at the point of transition to HE or without higher level qualifications and skills**;
 - iii. **workplace and workforce learning**, including personal, professional development and specific upskilling for new and different employment needs and to increase social mobility;
 - iv. **skills, access, pre-entry and progression opportunities for learners wishing to study through the medium of Welsh**;
 - v. **capacity-building in schools, communities and families to improve learner-support networks**;
 - vi. **developing and strengthening effective progression routes to further and higher education via school, post 16, work, community and other learning routes**;
- working to support the education and skills of **looked after children, care leavers and their carers**;

⁴ W10/16HE Guidance for the Submission of Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education, see sections E and G.

⁵ Protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 include: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships.

- promoting the Reaching Wider Programme regionally and nationally.

Initial Guidance

18. In 2008/2009, we invited the Higher Education Academy to review widening access strategies and Reaching Wider proposals. Its findings are attached at **Annex A**.
19. We do not wish to be overly prescriptive about the structure and content of the strategies. We recognise that they must be developed and implemented in line with the widening access requirements of regional institutional strategies and the more localised elements of institutions' widening access strategies. **Therefore, we are expecting that Partnership Chairs consider the Partnership governance arrangements and confirm that their regional partnerships have considered and approved these strategies.**
20. As funders, we wish to be assured that Partnerships' strategies include coherent and robust planning and delivery processes which are effectively implemented, monitored and reviewed by Partnership Steering Groups and with a clear reporting relationship to the higher education regional strategy group.
21. In addition to this, we will want to evaluate and monitor the strategies and to seek advice on the further development of the Programme.
22. Partnerships' strategies will be highly strategic documents which identify the direction of travel in relation to its regional widening access provision;
23. In developing strategies, Partnerships will want to take account of widening access-related policies and priorities, as appropriate including:
 - Welsh Assembly agendas relating to Communities First areas, community cohesion, adult community learning, 14-19 Partnerships, Children and Young People's partnerships, care leavers, refugees and asylum seekers,
 - The Welsh Assembly review of part-time study⁶
 - The Welsh Assembly review of Careers Wales⁷;
 - Equality and diversity requirements;
 - HE regional strategies;
 - institutional widening access strategies⁸;
 - Communities First Partnerships;
 - Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol developments and wider Welsh medium developments, including work with the Centre for Welsh Medium Higher Education;

⁶ *Research into Part-time Higher Education Supply and Demand (November 2010)* www.wales.gov.uk. See recommendation 4 relating to the Reaching Wider initiative.

⁷ *Future Ambitions: Developing Careers Services in Wales*, www.wales.gov.uk

⁸ Regional strategies and institutional widening access strategy guidance 2011/12 to 2013/14 also reference Reaching Wider.

- Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) developments and emerging models of promising practice.
24. It will be helpful to HEFCW and partners if strategies are concise, accessible statements which cover the Partnership's:
- i. **mission and purpose** as it relates to widening access in its region;
 - ii. **strategic aims and objectives** for the three-year strategy period, including equality and diversity-related priorities;
 - iii. **rationale** for the aims and objectives, including underpinning evidence of learner demand and/or labour market information;
 - iv. role in, relationship and contribution to, the **regional strategy developments**;
 - v. strategic alignment with **institutional widening access** planning and delivery;
 - vi. **management and governance structures** that will ensure partners' trust and commitment, provide leadership for, and drive cultural change in, the Reaching Wider Partnership including Steering Group partner members, including confirming the Partnership Chair⁹;
 - vii. equality and diversity-related policies and practices which will ensure **fair and transparent practice** and deliver **equality of opportunity**.
25. We encourage you to publish this first section, and we will monitor this through the AMS process. We consider that publishing this part of the strategy will:
- ensure that all partners are aware of, and can contribute to, the Partnership;
 - provide a mechanism for disseminating Reaching Wider aims and objectives to regional and other partners and partnerships, including Further Education Institutions, Communities First Partnerships, 14-19 Partnerships, Children and Young People's Partnerships, Adult Community Learning Partnerships, Careers Wales and the Third Sector; and
 - showcase the Partnership's commitment to widening access, social justice and promoting a buoyant economy.
26. In the second section of the strategy Partnerships may want to provide further information on the management of institutional widening access policy and practices during this strategy period including:
- i. providing a **critical assessment** of the Partnership's work in the period to 2010/11, including but not limited to: tracking and monitoring data analysis; key outcomes; lessons learnt; and areas for further development;

⁹ In this strategy period we anticipate that Steering Group members include all regional higher education institutions, including the Open University in Wales; all regional Further Education Colleges, a Communities First Partnership representative; a Careers Wales representative, an employer or Sector Skills Council representative; a Third Sector representative.

- ii. outlining the **alignment** between the Partnership's developments and broader widening access developments, particularly as they relate to the higher education regional strategies;
- iii. outlining the distinctions and relationship between Reaching Wider and **institutional widening access** activities;
- iv. identifying SMART **measures of success** and the **anticipated impact** on key target groups for each year of the strategy period¹⁰;
- v. assessing **risk** and the management of risk.

27. In this section you will want to summarise the key delivery strands. This might include:

- the package of provision in **Communities First areas**; including progression routes to and from this provision;
- **outreach and workbased learning provision**, noting subject/skills strands and progression opportunities to and from this provision;
- **vocational learning and skills-focused** opportunities particularly work-based learning, Foundation Degree developments, HE in FE, bite-sized chunks of learning within the Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFW);
- **progression routes to full- and part-time further and higher education provision**;
- **strategic and sustained activities**, rather than 'one off' interventions which are not embedded in programmes of continuous engagement with potential learners and thus unlikely to have significant impact or create cultural change;
- **Welsh medium and bilingual WA provision**;
- **information, advice and guidance** available to learners, including course, fees and funding guidance to ensure that potential applicants are fully informed of subject and course contents and fee and funding structures;
- processes for the **collection and utilisation** of widening access **monitoring and tracking systems**, evaluation evidence and equality impact assessments to: examine the potential and actual impact of interventions, policies and practices; to identify trends and priorities for interventions and change; and to enhance performance;
- promoting and disseminating **effective practice** to raise the profile of the Reaching Wider Programme in Wales, the UK and internationally.

28. We will look to support strategies which:

- are embedded within the **Partnership's and region's mission and purpose**;

¹⁰ Smart targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. They should focus outcomes and impact rather than mechanistic outputs as the HEA review reference above recommended.

- demonstrate a **coherent portfolio** of provision with opportunities for continuous engagement with learners and with clear progression opportunities;
- demonstrate **value for money**;
- demonstrate robust plans which evidence or respond adequately to **learner demand** or **labour market intelligence**;
- demonstrate **genuine and effective collaboration** and **multi-agency approaches**;
- include measures of success based on **strategic outcomes** which evidence change rather than on short-term, operational outputs;
- demonstrate robust arrangements for ensuring strategies are monitored, reviewed and developed;
- embed **programmes of continuous engagement**, rather than large-scale, 'one-off' interventions;
- provide sustained opportunities for learners to meaningfully **engage in decision-making processes**.

Funding

29. Circular W10/37HE noted that we proposed to fund Reaching Wider Partnerships more explicitly against Communities First areas from 2011/12. In this new strategy period we propose to fund the Reaching Wider Partnerships on a formula basis, as with other strategy funding. We are modelling the basis for a formula allocation and we will provide further information in supplementary guidance. In moving to formula funding we will endeavour to ensure that Partnerships are not de-stabilised.

April to July 2011 Funding

30. To enable a smooth transition from the initiative phase to the longer-term strategy phase, through this circular, we are **confirming Partnerships' funding for the period April 2011 to July 2011**. Allocations for this period will be made in March 2011. We will write to Partnership Chairs separately confirming Partnership allocations.

Annual Monitoring Statements

31. We will fund acceptable Reaching Wider strategies, subject to satisfactory Annual Monitoring Statement (AMS) reporting.
32. We will monitor the strategies via our annual monitoring process. To monitor the strategies effectively we require strategies to have SMART targets for the short term (2011/12) and medium term (2012/13 onwards). Templates identifying areas for which we require targets will be provided in our supplementary guidance in April 2011.

33. We recognise that institutions may wish to modify the medium term targets in their annual monitoring statements through identification of SMART targets for the coming year.

Equality and Diversity Implications

34. As part of our policy development process, we have undertaken an internal equality impact assessment screening to consider the impact of this guidance on learners with protected characteristics and groups under-represented in higher education.
35. We will publish the screening outcomes on our website. Given the significance of the strategies covered by this guidance, the panel recommended that we invite wider involvement in the development of our guidance.
36. Therefore, through this circular we are inviting views on the equality and diversity implications of this guidance to ensure that there is no negative impact on, nor unintended consequences to, individuals with protected characteristics or groups under-represented in higher education arising from the implementation of this guidance.
37. We would welcome institutions' committees with responsibility for equality and diversity and/or widening access issues reviewing this guidance in relation to its equality and diversity implications and submitting any issues to us.
38. We will take account of the outcomes of this consultation in the publication of the supplementary guidance in April 2011.
39. We invite submissions on these matters by **1 February 2011**.

Provisional Timetable

40. The current timetable for strategy development is provided below:

December 2010	Publication of initial Reaching Wider Strategy Guidance
December 2010	SETQC to advise HEFCW on supplementary strategy guidance
January/February 2011	HEFCW/Partnership meetings to discuss WA strategic developments in the light of <i>For Our Future</i> and learning and teaching-related matters if desired
1 February 2011	Final date for the submission of equality impact responses
13 April 2011	Higher Education Academy event on strategy

	evaluation and development. See: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/wales/events
April 2011	Publication of further guidance by HEFCW on Reaching Wider strategies, including funding allocations (if available)
June 2011	Reaching Wider Partnerships to submit strategies for 2011/12 to 2013/14
July 2011	Institutions to submit learning and teaching and widening access strategies for 2011/12 to 2013/14
September 2011 and March 2012	First and second tranches of funding for 2011/12 released, subject to satisfactory strategies
November 2011	Partnerships to submit separate Annual Monitoring Statements for 2010/11
January 2012	HEFCW to resolve any queries with Partnerships and to confirm release of second tranche funding in March 2012
January 2012	HE Academy to report on analysis of Learning and Teaching, Widening Access and Reaching Wider Strategies

Further information

41. For further information, contact jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk (tel 029 2068 2219) or rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk (tel: 029 2068 2227).

The Higher Education Academy's *Review of Institutional Widening Access Strategies 2006/07 to 2008/09 and the Reaching Wider Funded Proposals 2008/10*

1. A copy of the Academy's review can be found at:
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/wales/ourwork/wideningaccess>
2. The Academy's recommendations for HEIs, Reaching Wider Partnerships, HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government included four recommendations for the further development of Partnerships' work which we considered in formulating this guidance. The recommendations suggest that Partnerships:
 - map current and future engagement between HE institutions, between FE and HE, and other educational providers, to identify progression pathways, especially in vocational areas;
 - provide a cumulative and developmental programme of activities for engaging groups of people of all ages to enable them to progress to and through higher education;
 - encourage Reaching Wider staff and Partnership institutions to act upon the challenges identified by the regional audits and in particular to share expertise and effective policies and practices within their own institutions and across the sector;
 - consider a greater role for partners other than HEIs to lead on, and provide additional funding for these Partnership activities.