

HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education 2010/11 to 2012/13

Introduction

1. HEFCW's *Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* sets out our commitment to delivering the Welsh Assembly Government's widening access expectations in *For our Future: the Twenty-first Century Strategy and Plan for Higher Education*¹.
2. The HEFCW *Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* (from now on referred to as our *Approach*) sits beneath the HEFCW Corporate Strategy². It covers the same period, 2010-11 to 2012-13, and it provides a fuller picture of our strategic intentions. Its purpose is to promote a clear understanding of widening access policy and practice in Wales, as we recognise inconsistencies in meaning and messages are unhelpful for the sector, our partners and for learners³. Our intentions in setting out our *Approach* are to be: challenging in our aspirations; clear on our agenda for action; realistic in managing expectations, and transparent in providing a mechanism for measuring progress and demonstrating success.
3. We recognise that our *Approach* has been developed before the Comprehensive Spending Review outcomes and their implications for Higher Education in Wales are confirmed in terms of approval of the Welsh Assembly Government draft budget. In addition, we are mindful that there are policy implications arising from the Minister's statement on tuition fees (Assembly Government's response to the Browne Review of fees⁴). Clearly, we will need to take account of the impact of these and other emerging policy developments in implementing our *Approach*. In this dynamic policy context, we will keep our *Approach* under review to ensure it remains achievable and fit for purpose.
4. We recognise that higher education institutions' responses to government policy, including strategic actions to deliver widening access, are influenced by diverse factors, including missions, geography and partnerships. In addition, the economic climate and regional configurations in this period will drive significant funding and structural changes which will impact on widening access planning and delivery. Within this context, our *Approach* confirms how we will support the higher education sector and its partners to build on and maximise the widening access contribution to social justice and promoting a buoyant economy: the key *For our Future* priorities. Our aim is to work with higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that the sector's total widening access contribution delivers demonstrable benefits to learners, communities, employers and citizens and that it supports our business case for the use of public funding.

¹ *For our Future* can be found at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125hedocen.pdf>

² HEFCW's *Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13* can be found at: http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_strategy.aspx

³ A glossary of terms is provided at **Appendix A**.

⁴ *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education (Oct 2010)* www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report. The implications of the Assembly Government's fee policies will be the subject of further HEFCW publications.

5. This *Approach* has been informed by HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee (SETQC), SETQC's Widening Access Task and Finish Group and discussions with a range of individuals and organisations⁵. In addition, it has been subject to a full equalities impact assessment⁶.

HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13

6. Our *Approach* should be understood within the context of HEFCW's Corporate Strategy⁷. Our Corporate Strategy establishes Widening Access as one of five strategic themes which will contribute to delivering the *For our Future* priorities of social justice and supporting a buoyant economy as shown in the diagram in **Appendix C**.
7. We recognise that the five strategic themes are interdependent and cannot operate in isolation. Therefore, our widening access policies and practice will make a significant contribution to several of the Corporate Strategy themes including:
 - **The Student Experience**, including the student voice, part-time and flexible learning, workbased learning and Welsh medium study;
 - **Skills** and employability as key outcomes, equipping more people in Wales, including in the Heads of the Valleys, with new and/or higher level skills and offering improved learning opportunities; and
 - **Research** performance to underpin cultural and social renewal.
8. To focus our widening access intentions, our Corporate Strategy states that the purpose of widening access in Wales is to '**ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education**'.
9. **Appendix D** sets out our Corporate Strategy's high-level approach to widening access policy development which provides the foundations for our *Approach*.

Widening Access Measures of Success

10. In setting out our strategic approach, the Corporate Strategy also establishes how we will measure success. The primary target for widening access continues our focus on Communities First (CF) areas. It measures improved access and progression for people of *all ages* in locations where such opportunities are low, including the Heads of the Valleys, and it is a proxy measure of social class. We recognise that the new Communities First target is challenging as it seeks:

A 10% rise in the proportion of all Welsh domiciled students studying higher education courses at higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales who are domiciled in the Welsh Communities First Areas from 15.6% in 2008/09 to 17.2% in 2012/13.

⁵ **Appendix B** sets out the Task and Finish Group's membership and our initial stakeholder dialogues.

⁶ The equality impact assessment responses to circular [W10/36HE](#) will be published on our website.

⁷ See http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_documents.aspx

11. The second measure focuses on the number of students successfully completing their learning objectives, thus recognising the importance of ensuring widening access learners' success in and beyond higher education. It seeks:

A 2.7% rise in the module completion rate for undergraduate enrolments in Welsh higher education institutions from 87.6% in 2008/09 to 90% in 2012/13.

12. **Appendix E** provides additional information about the above measures.
13. In addition to these measures, we will also continue to monitor the sector's performance against other widening access indicators, using pre-existing data and taking account of other relevant UK performance indicators where appropriate. Indicators will include the recruitment and retention of disabled students, minority ethnic students, care leavers, and students' age, gender and socio-economic profiles. Wales has performed well in most of these indicators, therefore, our approach to monitoring will be risk-based, with more detailed monitoring and further action where concerns arise.
14. Other strands of our Corporate Strategy include measures we will also monitor to inform our understanding of widening access performance. These measures relate to part-time students and the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute⁸. In addition, we will review all existing datasets available to us to evidence sector performance and success.

HEFCW's Role

15. Our role in relation to widening access to higher education is to:
 - i. work with the **Welsh Assembly Government and the higher education sector** to ensure that widening access developments respond to, and align with, related Assembly Government policies and priorities and the aims and objectives of other education providers, as appropriate;
 - ii. **provide strategic direction and support** to implement *For our Future* widening access priorities and deliver our Corporate Strategy objectives;
 - iii. work with **Further Education Institutions, Careers Wales** and other education providers to ensure a collaborative, strategic approach to widening access across Wales⁹;
 - iv. inform policy developments through **strategic links** with relevant national and international agencies;
 - v. ensure that our policies are **evidence-based**;

⁸ See our [Corporate Strategy](#), Annex A Measures and Targets, pages 26-27.

⁹ **Appendix F** sets out who our key partners in the delivery of the *Approach* will be.

- vi. develop, implement and review a range of **mechanisms** to achieve our strategic objectives;
- vii. support **institutional widening access** developments through dedicated funding streams and guidance;
- viii. support the **Reaching Wider Programme** to ensure that it adds value to our priorities and retains and builds on its multi-agency and innovative partnership approaches;
- ix. support the implementation of the **Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (National Welsh College)** which will work with, and through, higher education institutions in Wales to deliver increased and sustainable Welsh medium learning and teaching opportunities at all levels and contribute to a professional, well-trained, bilingual workforce;
- x. ensure that **equality of opportunity** is a fundamental principle in developing and implementing widening access policies and practice¹⁰;
- xi. **promote and disseminate** current and effective widening access practices and to mainstream the lessons learnt across Wales, the UK and internationally.

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

- 16. This *Approach* contributes to the delivery of our Corporate Strategy widening access objectives, sets our agenda for action and provides a mechanism for monitoring progress.

Definition and Aim of Widening Access

- 17. 'Widening access to and through higher education' is the term we will use to define our strategic intentions in this policy area and encompass our strategic objectives.
- 18. The aim of widening access is to ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education to enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees.
- 19. We are committed to evaluating and refining our definition of widening access to contribute to advancing equality and diversity agendas. In addition to meeting our statutory responsibilities, our intention is to drive cultural change and proactive approaches to ensure that equity and diversity issues are fully integrated into our own and the sector's policies and practices and meet Welsh Assembly Government priorities.

¹⁰ HEFCW, as an Assembly Government Sponsored Body, has equality and diversity duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Summary of Widening Access Strategic Objectives

20. To achieve our aim we will:

- i. prioritise recruitment from Communities First areas;
- ii. improve access for groups under-represented in higher education;
- iii. prioritise student learning, retention and success;
- 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.

21. Our priorities within these strategic objectives are set out below, together with our initial actions. Separate circulars will provide information on implementation.

Strategic Objectives and Initial Actions

To prioritise recruitment from Communities First areas in Wales

22. A unique feature of our widening access policy in Wales is the prioritising of recruitment to, and success in, higher education by **people of all ages** from Communities First areas. HEFCW, as an Assembly Government Sponsored Body, is expected to engage with the relevant Communities First strategies and plans and we will continue our commitment to contribute effectively to this policy area. The Wales Audit Office report, *Communities First* (2009) identifies two complementary strands as fundamental to the effective regeneration of these communities: local partnership working; and programme 'bending', or alignment, to direct resources from appropriate public programmes and organisations towards Communities First areas¹¹. We recognise the potential for widening access objectives to contribute to tackling deprivation and improving the prospects for people in these designated communities.

¹¹ *Communities First*, Wales Audit Office (July 2009). See: www.wao.gov.uk

We will:

- i. work with the Assembly Government, further and higher education institutions and community organisations to contribute to reducing the gap in education and training outcomes between Communities First areas and other parts of Wales, including in the Heads of the Valleys;
- ii. contribute to meeting the Assembly Government's education and training strategic objectives, including those set out in its *Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales*;
- iii. measure the sector's commitment to improving access and progression for people in locations where such opportunities are low through a fundable target for engaging and retaining Communities First learners, as defined in our Corporate Strategy.

To improve access for groups under-represented in higher education

23. We will work with the Assembly Government to contribute to strategies aimed at supporting under-represented groups as ensuring a diverse student population is a key driver of our widening access policy developments¹². *For our Future* (paragraph 23) recognises that Wales performs well, compared with other parts of the UK, in attracting students from under-represented backgrounds, including those from low participation neighbourhoods, state schools, and those with disabilities¹³. While this positive position provides a firm basis for developments, the dynamic nature of the HE environment, including increased pressure on HE places and the potential displacement of widening access applicants, means that we cannot be complacent.
24. Our 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 (recently superseded by the 2010 Equality Act)¹⁴. However, our strategic intentions extend beyond compliance. To further inform our understanding of the nature of, and trends in, under-representation, we will assess a range of datasets to evidence and develop sector and institutional performance. In addition, we will support widening access strategies and interventions which are informed by effective management data¹⁵. We will encourage institutions to monitor and take action to ameliorate differences in selection, attainment or retention patterns, to

¹² Including: the *Refugee and Inclusion Strategy*

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/communitycohesion/publications/refugeeinclusion/?lang=eng>
Assembly Government *Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales*

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/childrenandyoungpeople/cpstrategy/?lang=en>
and *Getting on Together, a Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales*:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/communitycohesion/publications/strategy/?lang=en>

¹³ Our equalities monitoring data (2006/07 to 2008/09) confirms that, amongst other indicators, at Welsh HEIs: the number of students aged 20-29 has increased; the number of students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance has risen by 13.6%; and the proportion of UK-domiciled ethnic minority students at Welsh HEIs is greater than the proportion of ethnic minority students in the UK student weighted census population. Wales also has a higher proportion of part time students in higher education than the rest of the UK.

¹⁴ http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/about_us/equality_and_diversity_in_hefcw/equality_diversity_reports.aspx

¹⁵ See also priorities under improving the evidence base to support widening access and impact assessment.

develop appropriate student support mechanisms, and to disseminate effective practice.

25. In this context, we also recognise the role that family and intergenerational learning can play in creating a learning culture in homes and communities, contributing to reducing child poverty in Wales and providing parents with skills to access higher level learning and employment. We recognise the sector's commitment to raising the educational aspirations and supporting the lifechances of children in care and care leavers, with all Welsh HEIs having achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark¹⁶. We will work with the Buttle UK and the sector to encourage the further development of support for children in care and care leavers and to disseminate effective practice. We will encourage the sector to take a multi-agency approach to developing further such innovative approaches which improve the learning choices and chances of families, communities and care leavers.

We will:

- iv. align widening access policy developments with Assembly Government strategies which support groups under-represented in higher education;
- v. fund institutional widening access and Reaching Wider strategies that are informed by robust data collection and analysis;
- vi. assess the sector's performance against a range of widening access indicators to demonstrate progress and inform policy development.

To prioritise student learning, retention and success

26. In prioritising student success and retention in our widening access *Approach* we acknowledge that a multiplicity of factors influence completion rates: widening access characteristics amongst them. We are aware that a higher number of Communities First students do not continue beyond their first year of study than other groups in the rest of the UK¹⁷. However, correlation between these factors is not inevitable and we are confident that more can be done to improve learning outcomes¹⁸. We recognise that, in the current economic climate, it is plausible that continuation rates may improve because employment opportunities are scarcer. We will support the sector to actively improve module completion rates and to improve performance in relation to the UK non-continuation indicators.

¹⁶ The Frank Buttle Trust will become the Buttle UK from 1 March 2011.

¹⁷ Communities First non-continuation rate following first year of entry: Welsh domiciled full-time first year degree entrants 16.2% (UK rate 8.6%); young full time first year degree entrants 13.6% (UK rate 7.2%); mature full-time first year degree entrants 20.1% (UK rate 14.0%). (Source: HESA 2008/09)

¹⁸ An international comparative study of ten developed world countries found that students from lower socio-economic groups were accessing higher education at lower rates than peers from more advantaged groups, these groups did not necessarily have lower rates of retention and success (Thomas, E. and Quinn, J. 2003. *International Insights into Widening Participation: Supporting the Success of Underrepresented Groups in Tertiary Education*. Stoke on Trent: Staffordshire University and the European Access Network with the Sutton Trust and the Esmee Fairburn Foundation.)

27. We recognise that reviewing and revising approaches to: curriculum design; curriculum content; pedagogical and assessment issues; and programme delivery, to take account of the needs of a diverse student body, will contribute to enhancing the student experience for all learners. Such approaches will also contribute to a positive cultural change which prioritises student learning and success and we will work with the sector to promote the sharing of promising practice and the closer alignment of learning and teaching and widening access strategic approaches.
28. Our Corporate Strategy sets out a fundable target for learner completion, the key features of which are outlined in **Appendix E: Widening Access Measures of Success**. Furthermore, we will work with the Higher Education Academy to provide leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice to enhance student learning, retention and success and we will work with the sector to develop, embed and promote effective practice.
29. We recognise the importance of the National Student Survey in enabling students to express their views on their higher education experiences and we will continue to contribute to this work.

We will:

- vii. measure sector progress against a fundable target for module completion as included in our Corporate Strategy;
- viii. monitor annually HE non-completion rates, with particular emphasis on under-represented groups;
- ix. monitor annually the outcomes of the National Student Survey to respond to students' experiences, identify areas of concern and promote effective practice in student engagement;
- x. identify and share effective practice on retention;
- xi. work with the Higher Education Academy to provide leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice to enhance the student learning experience.

To support fair access to the professions, higher level skills and the priority sectors

30. *Unleashing Aspiration* (2009) identified a number of barriers in relation to 'fair access to the professions'¹⁹. In Wales we have interpreted issues of fair access more broadly to include access to the professions, to higher level skills and the priority sectors²⁰. Fair access requires that learning and employment opportunities are open to as wide a pool of talent as possible. We recognise that social mobility and the opportunity to fulfil one's potential are key aspects of social justice and economic prosperity. We recognise that progress towards

¹⁹ [Unleashing Aspiration](#)

²⁰ *Skills that Work for Wales* identifies sectors considered strategically important for the sustainable growth of the Welsh economy. See <http://www.learningobservatory.com/uploads/publications/1723.pdf>

widening access to the professions will be challenging as the costs incurred through undergraduate study may be a barrier for widening access students considering post-graduate qualifications, which are a pre-requisite for entry to some professions. Working with the sector we will contribute to the *For our Future vision* of higher education:

equipping individuals, whatever their background, with the knowledge skills and attributes to achieve maximum intellectual and personal fulfilment. (paragraph 1.)

31. Our Corporate Strategy (p.15) outlines our intentions to increase skills levels and meet the higher level skills needs of business. Our *Approach* contributes to this agenda by: supporting more locally accessible higher education; providing pathways into part-time and workbased opportunities; upskilling individuals to contribute to the digital economy; promoting routes into science, technology, engineering and maths/medicine-related professions and seeking to increase more flexible, higher-level vocational pathways²¹.
32. We recognise that Higher Apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees are an important mechanism for delivering improved access to, and new opportunities in, further and higher education and employment. We anticipate that regional developments will include plans to pilot and expand routes to and from Higher Apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees and we will work with the sector to contribute fully to economic upskilling and regeneration. We will support widening access developments that: take account of regional and national skills priorities; focus on economic upskilling and regeneration; and collaborate with businesses, Careers Wales and Learning Coach developments to ensure that learner choices are underpinned by high-quality information, advice and guidance.
33. We will take account of the work of the UK Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme to develop fair and professional standards in admissions practice, and to inform our policy developments and the practices of the sector and other stakeholders. Working with UCAS, we will continue to contribute to national admissions policy developments and consultations, particularly as they impact on Wales and Welsh language issues.

²¹ See HEFCW strategy on enhanced learning and teaching through technology: [W08/12HE](#)

We will:

- xii. identify and disseminate effective international, national and Welsh practice in improving access to the professions, higher-level skills and the priority sectors;
- xiii. publish our Foundation Degree Policy and fund the development, promotion and delivery of new Foundation Degree provision, firmly embedded in regional strategies;
- xiv. support the sector to collaboratively explore and pilot new flexible programmes which enable progression to Foundation Degrees and beyond;
- xv. develop closer working arrangements with Careers Wales to inform learner choice and promote Higher Apprenticeships and Foundation Degree opportunities.

To encourage flexible learning opportunities, including part-time routes to and through higher education

- 34. As more people with diverse backgrounds participate in higher education, the concept and nature of traditional higher education is changing and we will encourage the sector to respond to new patterns of demand and new forms of supply.
- 35. We recognise the need to respond to knowledge and higher level skills gaps at national and individual levels arising from: re-skilling and skills requirements, an aging demographic; changing patterns of paid and unpaid activity; and the demands of widening access and equality and diversity. *The Skills that Work for Wales Strategy and Action Plan (2008)* recognises that without retraining, older workers' skills may become obsolete, undermining opportunities for personal development and productivity²². We recognise that lifelong learning opportunities, across the whole life course, will become increasingly important in maintaining and updating skills and in providing wider benefits of learning as our workforce ages²³. We acknowledge that there are widening access issues for post-graduate and international students but, given current financial constraints, we consider that, primarily, our resources should be targeted at pre-entry and undergraduate groups.
- 36. We will encourage the sector to extend and promote the range of learning opportunities to remove real and perceived learning barriers and enable more people to develop personal, transferrable, vocational and entrepreneurial skills. We will support demand-led flexible learning opportunities in regions and communities. To achieve this, opportunities must be relevant, tailor-made and available at times and locations that fit around work and lifestyle commitments. To this end, we will take account of the Assembly Government's Adult Community Learning strategic statement and we will publish further information outlining how we will support the sector to recognise prior experiential

²² <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/081217stfwfwstrategyandactionen.pdf>

²³ *Learning Through Life: The Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning* highlights the contribution that diverse learning opportunities can make to 'control over individual and group destinies, health and wellbeing, cultural identity and democratic tolerance. *Learning Through Life Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (NIACE, 2009, p.1)*

learning²⁴. We will align our widening access developments with: existing strategies to enhance learning and teaching through technology; Welsh medium and language developments through the **Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol**; and our ongoing commitment to maintain and strengthen support for part-time learners²⁵. We endorse the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and the Learning Records Service (formerly Managing Information Across Partnerships) developments which offer greater flexibility and increased portability when moving between learning providers and employers.

We will:

- xvi. review part-time funding mechanisms to ensure they remain fit for purpose and support our widening access strategic objectives;
- xvii. analyse and report progress on part-time learning and teaching developments;
- xviii. publish guidance and fund regional strategies, widening access, and learning and teaching strategies that: provide flexible learning opportunities; recognise and accredit prior experiential learning; and support progression to and from higher level learning and skills, including Foundation Degrees.

To secure clear articulation and progression pathways into higher education

37. We will work with the Assembly Government to align widening access developments with post-16, skills and adult and community learning policies and priorities to ensure a coherent approach to progression pathway planning and implementation.
38. We are committed to widening access to all higher education institutions in Wales and the UK for all students, regardless of their background. However, many first generation, widening access HE applicants are unwilling or unable to move away from home or work to study, therefore their choices are limited by the range and accessibility of local provision. One outcome of the regional planning and delivery framework will be that *'clearer progression pathways to higher education are in place from school, community, workplace and further education'* (*For our Future*, paragraph 42). We recognise the need for the HE sector to work collaboratively with other education and training providers, including employers, Careers Wales and Learning Coaches to further develop and promote regional learning opportunities and make the best use of resources. We have already signalled that higher education providers' regional strategies should secure better subject availability, easier geographical access, clearer progression routes and, overall, a higher degree of responsiveness to local learner and employer needs²⁶.
39. We will support the sector to increase its recognition of prior learning (RPL) to facilitate shorter, more timely higher education experiences, in line with *For our*

²⁴ *Delivering Community Learning for Wales*, (November 2010) see: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/communitylearning/deliveringlearning/?jsessionid=hC6jMvHW2nTqcf1pcRNZ7KLNfYwwhhJm1nTRztSJTcw20I5h5LBX!320120316?lang=en>

²⁵ See circular reference number: [W08/12HE](#)

²⁶ See circulars reference numbers: [W10/16HE](#) and [W10/06HE](#)

Future expectations. RPL will facilitate increased, flexible participation in higher education. Increased accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) will facilitate workforce development and enable the higher education community to play a more central, innovative and transformative role in supporting business development in the regional and national economy.

We will:

- xix. support regional strategies that include coordinated widening access opportunities which contribute to clear, new and improved progression pathway developments;
- xx. promote the use of the Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFW), recognition of prior learning and the Learning Records Service to recognise learners' achievements and support flexible study pathways;
- xxi. publish our position on funding APEL and good practice guidelines for institutions.

To maximise the potential for collaborative, cross-sectoral, multi-agency approaches

40. The Assembly Government, set out, in *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales* (2008), its intentions to improve learning opportunities and *Transformation – Y Siwrnai* (2009) outlines how the post-16 phase of this policy should be implemented²⁷. The challenge this strategic framework sets includes: transforming the learning network to increase learner choice; securing the best delivery model to plan provision collectively; utilising funding more effectively; increasing the engagement of disadvantaged groups; reducing duplication of provision; and improving learning opportunities for all post-16 learners. We will ensure that our widening access policy developments align with, and contribute fully to, this strategic framework.
41. We recognise the progress that widening access has made in developing inclusive, cross-sectoral policies and practices, including through the Reaching Wider Partnerships. Higher education widening access interests are normally well-represented on provider networks and we have substantial evidence of the sector's effectiveness in forming flexible partnership configurations to attract European and other external funding to support innovative practices or action research.

²⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/100301transformationpolicyen.pdf>
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125transformationen.pdf>

We will:

- xxii. support widening access and Reaching Wider strategies which demonstrate genuine partnership working and add value to learning and teaching;
- xxiii. broker more multi-agency strategic dialogue and promote more effective cross-sectoral working;
- xxiv. coordinate cross-sectoral events to promote widening access policy developments and champion effective practice.

To deploy resources to deliver our widening access objectives

42. We recognise that increased costs are incurred in supporting some under-represented groups. We contribute to meeting the costs of recruiting and supporting people from widening access and diversity backgrounds through recurrent funding²⁸. Our funding mechanisms support the delivery of our strategic priorities and reward effective progress towards delivering *For our Future* objectives. We recognise the need to ensure these mechanisms remain fit for purpose and are effective drivers of change.

We will:

- xxv. focus widening access funding strategically to reward effective progress towards delivering *For our Future and Corporate Strategy* objectives;
- xxvi. review and monitor widening access funding arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose;
- xxvii. examine the extent to which fee plans are aligned and contribute to broader institutional widening access policies and practices;
- xxviii. assess the extent to which there is equity between part-time and full-time student support and fee policies.

To apply a regional framework to target widening access more effectively

43. The requirement for a regional dimension to HE planning and delivery is set out in our Corporate Strategy (p.9). These new structures will enable the sector to increase its contribution to tackling disparity in access and opportunity across Wales at a regional level. We intend to encourage more responsive regional delivery while encouraging learner progression to all higher education provision, regardless of regional boundaries. Regional working will further align supply and demand by: driving increased strategic collaboration between HE and FE and other partners; avoiding local competition and wasteful duplication; encouraging the development of regional progression pathways and articulation agreements; facilitating closer employer engagement; and responding more

²⁸ Appendix G sets out the sector's 2010/11 widening access-specific funding allocations.

effectively to communities and learners. In this context, multi-agency, cross-sectoral working will be fundamental to increasing the diversity of the student population.

44. The regional strategies will examine the role of both institutional widening access and Reaching Wider Partnership provision, to ensure they align with, and contribute fully to, broader regional developments. These include: the range and nature of compact agreements, HE in FE provision; genuine partnership with 14-19 learning networks and Children and Young People's partnerships; and contributions to Adult Community Learning partnerships. In this strategy period the Reaching Wider Partnerships will become a key mechanism which contributes to the coordination and delivery of regional widening access provision. We do not expect this coordinating function to be overly bureaucratic or burdensome, given the anticipated cost-benefits outlined above.
45. We recognise that the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) developments have the potential to inform widening access practices across Wales. Working with the UHOVI programme, we will identify and disseminate effective practice, encouraging its adaptation to rural and urban settings across Wales.

We will:

- xxix. support strategies which articulate clearly the regional role of widening access, including the Reaching Wider Programme;
- xxx. monitor regional strategies to ensure that they contribute to increasing learner progression routes to and through higher education, higher level skills and priority sectors;
- xxxi. identify and disseminate effective practice from the UHOVI programme and encourage its adaptation to rural and urban settings across Wales, as appropriate.

To improve the evidence base to support widening access and impact assessment

46. We commissioned evaluations of widening access work in Wales (Arad, 2007, and the Higher Education Academy, 2009,)²⁹ and we will undertake other evaluations, as appropriate, to inform further policy development and demonstrate success. The evaluation recommendations proposed that more should be done to improve institutions' widening access evidence base and to inform strategic and operational developments. Therefore, a priority in this strategy period is for HEFCW and the sector to improve widening access data collection and analysis to demonstrate impact, improve performance and showcase the success of widening access policies and practices. We recognise that continuous and systematic data collection and analysis will inform the business case for widening access. As noted above, the Learning Records

²⁹ See: http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2007/w0709he%20circ.pdf and <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/wales/ourwork/wideningaccess>

Service will support the tracking of learners' achievement across providers and we encourage the sector to participate fully in these developments.

47. We recognise the importance of evaluating widening access interventions, and publishing the outcomes, to contribute to the sector's evidence base and ensure that we maintain progress towards opening up HE opportunities to under-represented groups. We will take account of UK and international widening access evaluations and data sets to inform policy developments and contextualise the sector's progress and achievements.

We will:

- xxxii. monitor applications from, participation by, and the learning success of different under-represented groups to inform policy developments;
- xxxiii. fund widening access and Reaching Wider strategies that identify and outline actions to deliver challenging outcomes, which align with the widening access priorities set out in this *Approach*;
- xxxiv. systematically collect and disseminate effective practice to demonstrate the sector's success in widening access;
- xxxv. review and monitor fee plan arrangements to ensure alignment between institutional widening access strategic objectives;
- xxxvi. evaluate widening access policies and practice to ensure effective progress towards meeting *For our Future* expectations and our Corporate Strategy aims.

Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

14-19 Learning Networks	Learning Pathways 14-19 is an Assembly Government strategy to transform learning provision for young people in Wales. The 14-19 Networks are responsible for planning and delivering a range of programmes based on the local needs of the area. The Networks include partners from all relevant sectors.
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning is the process through which learning achieved through prior experience, eg from work, community or volunteering, which has not been previously assessed and/or awarded credit, is recognised. Credit is not awarded for the experience itself, but for the learning evidenced from that experience.
<i>Approach</i>	<i>HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education.</i>
Buttle UK Quality Mark	Buttle UK, formerly known as the Frank Buttle Trust, established a quality mark for care leavers in higher education in 2006 to recognise those universities which demonstrate their commitment to supporting students who have been in public care.
Careers Wales	Careers Wales provides all-age, free, bilingual, impartial careers information, advice and guidance.
Children & Young People's Partnerships	A Welsh Assembly Government initiative that provides a strategic context for planning and delivering services for children and young people from 0 - 19 years, care leavers up to 21 (or above if in continuing education or training) and those receiving youth support services (up to the age of 25).
Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol	Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (previously referred to as Coleg Ffederal) will be formally established in early 2011 to support and promote Welsh medium higher education, working with and through higher education institutions in Wales.

Communities First	Communities First is the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship programme to improve the living conditions and prospects of people in the most disadvantaged communities across Wales.
Continuation rates	Data collated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency includes generic information on students' progression through university from the year they enter to the following year.
Corporate Strategy	HEFCW's three-year Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13 sets out our vision and measures for higher education in Wales. It is HEFCW's action plan for delivering <i>For our Future</i> .
CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales: This Assembly Government-led initiative manages and develops a nationally agreed framework which recognises the level and volume of an individual's learning and demonstrates its equivalence to other learning programmes or qualifications.
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). This is a process used by bodies such as HEFCW to ensure that we do not discriminate in our services, functions, policies and employment and that we do all we can to promote equality and good relations between different groups.
FEI/C	Further Education Institutions/Colleges.

For our Future

For our Future: The Twenty-First Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales is the Assembly Government's strategy for Higher Education, published in November 2009.

HE	Higher Education.
HEA	The Higher Education Academy works with UK universities and colleges, providing national leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice about enhancing the student learning experience.
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions.
Learning Coaches	The Assembly Government established <i>The Teaching and Learning Programme</i> , which includes the Subject Learning Coaches Programme. It is designed to provide learner support to increase learner motivation, improve retention, enhance success and boost teacher and trainer morale.
Learning Records Service	The Learning Records Service is a UK pilot information technology-based project to enable the sharing of learner records across the whole education sector.
Programme bending	Programme bending is a term used by the Wales Audit Office in its report on the Communities First programme (2009). It describes the process of closely aligning appropriate Welsh Assembly and Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies' policies and programmes with Communities First priorities.
Progression pathways	Progression pathways should identify for learners the next level of learning available to them to enable them to increase their skills or qualifications.

Regional framework	<i>For our Future</i> set an expectation that HEFCW and universities would develop a regional dimension to the planning and delivery of higher education to improve collaboration, meet local and regional learning needs and priorities.
RPL	The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process for assessing and recognising (including via allocation of credit) prior learning, which may be either experiential learning or certificated learning.
Reaching Wider (RW)	Reaching Wider was an Assembly Government initiative, established in 2002 and managed by HEFCW, as a widening access mechanism to break down perceived barriers and widen access to learning. The Wales-wide programme supports social justice and promoting a buoyant economy.
Reaching Wider Partnerships	Regional Reaching Wider Partnerships were established under the Reaching Wider Initiative to co-ordinate collaborative widening access activities across Wales. From 2011/12 there will be three regional Partnerships aligned with the higher education regional strategy areas.
SETQC	The Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee is a sub-committee of HEFCW's Council.
Supporting Professionalism in Admissions	The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme was established in 2006 and works closely with higher education institutions, schools and colleges and other stakeholders on the continuing development of fair admissions and good practice in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation across the UK higher education sector.

<i>The Skills that Work for Wales</i>	The Welsh Assembly Government's <i>Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan for Wales</i> (2008). The strategy provides a Wales-focused response to the <i>Leitch Review of Skills (Prosperity for all in the global economy-world class skills)</i> , December 2006, and <i>The Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education (Promise and Performance)</i> (December 2007) .
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the UK-wide organisation responsible for managing full-time applications to higher education courses.
UHOVI	Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) is a strategic partnership project managed by the University of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport. Working closely with further education colleges and training providers, local communities and businesses operating in the Heads of the Valleys, UHOVI will develop industry-specific skills tailored to the needs of the region to support economic and social regeneration.
Unleashing Aspirations	The UK Government's England-focused response to the <i>Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions</i> , January 2010. The report considers issues relating to improving access to the professions and widening participation in higher education.
UUK	Universities UK is the major representative body and membership organisation for the higher education sector. Its members are the executive heads of UK universities.
Widening Access	Widening access policies and practices aim to ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education to enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees.
Widening Access Task and Finish Group	A sub-group of HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee, established to advise SETQC on the development of this <i>Approach</i> .

Appendix B

Membership of HEFCW's Student Experience Teaching and Quality Committee's (SETQC) Widening Access Task and Finish Group

Katie Dalton/ Sophie Buchaillard-Davies, National Union of Students, Wales;
Jacqui Hare, HEW nominee;
Rob Humphreys, Regional Director, The Open University in Wales;
Dr Peter Noyes, Higher Education Wales nominee/ Viv Davies, Universities Association of Lifelong Learning Cymru Chair, as his deputy;
Richard Spear, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Dysgu Cymru;
Professor Alan Speight, Chair of Reaching Wider Partnerships;
Gavin Thomas, Colegau Cymru consultant;
Lisa Newberry or Greg Walker, Higher Education Wales.

Officers

Dr David Blaney, (Task and Finish Group Chair), Director Strategic Development
Celia Hunt, Head of Strategy, Learning and Funding
Jane Johns (Secretariat), Senior Widening Access Policy Manager
Rachel O'Gorman, Reaching Wider Officer

Expert Witnesses and Organisations contributing to the Task and Finish Group's strategic discussions

Expert Witnesses

Bryn Davies, Colegau Cymru Chair;
Dr Hywel Davies, Joint Chair of the UCAS Welsh Standing Group and Director of Recruitment and Admissions, Aberystwyth University;
Jackie Doodson, Colegau Cymru member, Principal Coleg Llandrillo;
Owen Evans, formerly Director of Business in the Community;
Janet Graham, Director, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme (SPA);
John Graystone, Colegau Cymru Chief Executive;
Professor Leni Oglesby, Council member, Chair of SETQC;
Malcolm Maguire, Assembly Government-commissioned consultant on *Student withdrawal from HE* (May 2009);
Professor Danny Saunders OBE, Head of the Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Glamorgan; Wales Employment and Skills Board member;
John Selby, Member of HEFCW's Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee; formerly HEFCE Director (Education & Participation);
Professor Liz Thomas, Higher Education Academy.

Organisations

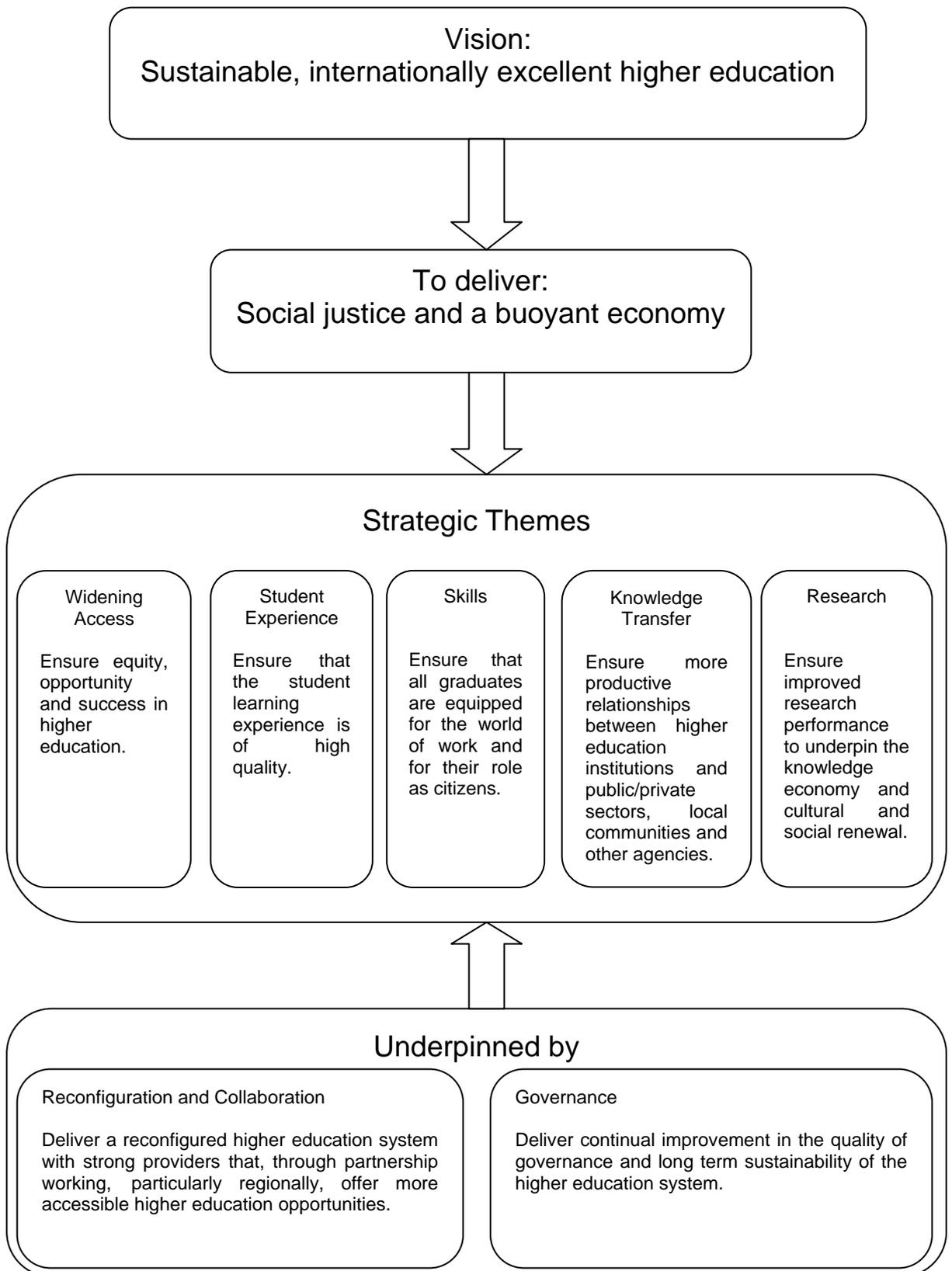
Association of the Managers of Student Services in Higher Education in Wales (AMOSSHE Wales);
Higher Education Wales (HEW) Pro Vice-Chancellors' Group;
Universities Association of Lifelong Learning Wales (UALL) Cymru

In addition SETQC members received and commented on the *HEFCW Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* at several stages during its development.

SETQC membership is available at:

http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/council_and_committees/council_and_committees.aspx

Corporate Strategy Strategic Themes



HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010/11 to 2012/13**Key Strategic Theme: Widening Access*****To ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education***

'Social justice is a key Welsh Assembly Government priority. Higher education has an important contribution to make to this aim in terms of widening access. The Welsh sector continues to perform well against UK performance indicators in this area but we want to see a continuing drive for further improvement. During the period of this strategy we will refocus our approach to widening access, including the Reaching Wider Initiative. We will drive strategic approaches to widening access for all ages through our revised funding arrangements, including through premium payments. We will encourage higher education providers to improve the evidence base, including data collection, to inform their strategies and to demonstrate impact and success. There will be a particular focus on part-time (including innovative approaches to flexible and work-based) provision, fair access to the professions and on retention – with an emphasis on helping students to complete their learning objectives successfully. We will continue to focus our widening access programmes on the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First programme and will strengthen our funding drivers to support our widening access objectives.

A fundamental new element in this corporate strategy is the requirement for a regional approach to the planning and delivery of higher education. This approach will deliver improved progression rates to, and through, higher education, by the end of the strategy period. During the period of this strategy we will work with partners to support the Universities Heads of the Valleys Initiative. We will review the structures of our Reaching Wider partnerships to further align with our regional approach. We will work with Welsh Assembly Government officials to rationalise student bursary arrangements, including through fee plan arrangements.

In the area of Widening Access we will work particularly towards the following For our Future priorities:

- i. participation is maximised through different and more flexible ways to experience higher education, including through part time study*
- ii. inconsistencies in access and opportunity are addressed*
- iii. refocus our approach to widening access to higher education.'*

Widening Access Measures of Success Additional Information

Communities First Measure

The Communities First measure provides some continuity for planning and delivery, as these areas have been our widening access focus since 2002. These areas provide a Wales-specific dimension to our work, while complementing the UK-wide performance indicator data. However, this new Communities First measure has been developed to:

- include Communities First areas across Wales, rather than the previous 100 most deprived wards;
- take account of all students, including postgraduates, instead of only first year entrants: thus improving the measurement of HEIs' progress in recruiting and retaining Communities First learners; and
- focus on the proportion of students, rather than absolute student numbers: to continue to ensure the overall percentage of widening access students does not fall, particularly given funding and capping limitations.

Module Completion Measure

A module completion measure, rather than focusing on non-continuation (the UK performance indicator) recognises the role of (i) the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and (ii) HEFCW's funding by credit. These factors enable Welsh HEIs to offer flexible, modular provision, facilitating learners movement in and out of the system according to their learning needs, working patterns and lifestyle³⁰. This measure includes both full-time and part-time undergraduates and we recognise that this strong focus on the learning success of *all* students will contribute to improving completion rates for widening access students.

³⁰ www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Partners in delivery of HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education

In addition to working closely with Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Colleges which we fund, we will work with the following over the strategy period to deliver *For our Future* and Corporate Strategy priorities relevant to widening access:

14-19 Learning Networks

Adult Community Learning Partnerships

Agored Cymru

Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education

Business in the Community

Buttle UK

Careers Wales

Children and Young People's Partnerships

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

Colegau Cymru

Communities First Partnerships

ContinYou Cymru

Estyn

Higher Education Academy

Higher Education Wales

Learning Records Service

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Dysgu Cymru

National Leadership & Innovation Agency for Healthcare

National Union of Students, Wales

Quality Assurance Agency

Reaching Wider Partnerships

Schools

Sector Skills Councils

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions

Third Sector

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Universities Association of Lifelong Learning Cymru

Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers Wales

Universities UK

Welsh Assembly Government

Sources of Widening Access Funding 2010/11

Strategic Implementation Fund

Funding stream 2010/11	2010/11 Sector Allocation £
Widening Access Strategy Funding	2,016,595
Additional Support for PT Students ³¹	4,257,000
Total Funding	6,273,595

Funding stream 2010/11	2010/11 Sector Allocation £
Reaching Wider Initiative	2,026,000
Total Funding	2,026,000

Core Funding

Funding Stream 2010/11	2010/11 Sector Allocation £
Widening Access Premium ³²	7,936,907
Disability Premium	925,320
Total Funding	8,862,227

³¹ Allocations are taken from circular W10/19HE. Please note that as part of the submission of plans for 2010/11, institutions were allowed to vire between the funding strands of Widening Access and Innovation & Engagement to a maximum of 20% of the allocation.

³² Premium funding is calculated as part of the teaching funding method, and is provided to institutions as block grant. Block grant is not tied to any specific deliverables.