

## HEFCW National Conference round table discussion and consultation questions

- i. Which aspects of widening access should be prioritised? What is the rationale for this prioritisation and how should these aspects be sustained and future-proofed?
- ii. Whether, and if so what, more should be done to maintain progress towards widening access to, through and beyond higher education and what more should be done to meet the challenges and create opportunities?
- iii. What are the challenges to, and opportunities for, further effective collaborative partnerships to promote and enhance access to higher education? Where should we look for models of collaborative partnership working?
- iv. How might we further improve the widening access evidence-base, demonstrate impact and make the case for widening access?
- v. What more should be done to raise the profile of, and promote, widening access?

## Conference discussion and consultation session outcomes

The consultation sessions considered a range of issues. While there was consistency in many of the responses, as expected from cross-sector discussions and a diverse HE sector there were also areas of difference. Key points included:

### Widening access provision

- 1.1 the importance of all-age approaches to widening access, across the whole learner lifecycle from primary school age to adults and family learning.
- 1.2 diversity in delivery modes and delivery locations to engage all types of learners, including part-time, flexible and Welsh medium provision.

### WA priority groups

- 1.3 people of all ages from Community First areas, but recognising that socio-economic disadvantage was not solely geographically clustered.
- 1.4 broader under-represented groups, including forces' veterans and young learners estranged from their parents.
- 1.5 work with priority groups should be underpinned by work with teachers, parents, carers, employers.

### Collaboration

- 1.6 the Reaching Wider Partnerships of universities, colleges, schools, Careers Wales, employers, local education authorities, Communities First representatives and other partners were recognised as effective partnership models.

- 1.7 the importance of collaboration, including intra-and inter-institutional collaboration as well as closer working between 'academic' and 'vocational' partners, where such divisions exist.
- 1.8 the costs and disadvantages of 'silo' working.
- 1.9 a national model of collaboration would incentivise effective partnership working.
- 1.10 competitive relationships between some schools and FE structures was challenging for some collaborations.
- 1.11 employers' corporate social responsibility and their contribution to WA as role models in schools created collaborative opportunities.
- 1.12 school time and resource pressures created challenges for establishing strategic interventions.
- 1.13 effective partnership models were reported including: an American university owning a 'feeder; secondary school; OER Scotland funded to produce and promote OER across universities in Scotland, UHOVI.

#### Promotion

- 1.14 universities needed to celebrate their success. HEIs should collectively promote widening access including HE in FE to learners and employers.
- 1.15 the extent of HE WA work was not always widely known within institutions, regions or by policy makers and more should be done to capture and promote this work.
- 1.16 universities need to promote graduates' success to inspire learners.

#### Evaluation and measures

- 1.17 the WA research base was considered limited with more quantitative and qualitative work required at national and institutional level.
- 1.18 impact definitions were required as they related to individuals, groups and the nation.
- 1.19 a widening access framework for Wales was required before a programme of action was developed.
- 1.20 WA was a long-term agenda and required that impact measures be maintained in the long-term to evidence progress.
- 1.21 Measuring the 'value added' of WA was important and HEI business plans should identify the benefits of additional WA investments from fee plan income.
- 1.22 sector-wide measures encourage collaboration and discourage competition.
- 1.23 the use of the Learner Record System and unique learner number (ULN) was encouraged as a means of overcoming many schools' reluctance to share aggregated pupil data thus preventing effective data collection to evidence WA impact.
- 1.24 the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) HEFCE funded (£3m) model of tracking participation was noted as a new cross-sector tracking model.

## Funding

- 1.25 Effective partnership was sustainable if underpinned by long-term policies and long-term investment. Bursaries were considered either as ineffective or more effective if strategically focused.
- 1.26 The removal of the cap in England could impact on Welsh university funding affecting expensive provision, such as WA, and resulting in increased cross-border flows with recruitment of WA students to English HEIs.
- 1.27 fee plans prevent agility in reacting positively to changing WA market demand.
- 1.28 student finance is complex and more should be done to demystify the HE financial processes.

## Policy

- 1.29 Welsh Government departments should adopt a more 'joined up' approach to WA.
- 1.30 the Welsh Government should promote the ULN more effectively.
- 1.31 HEFCW should promote widening access impacts to partners, including to the Welsh Government.
- 1.32 HEFCW should request more holistic reporting from similar programmes or partnerships to encourage more 'joined up' approaches.
- 1.33 HEFCW should brand more strongly the national Reaching Wider Programme and improve consistency of approaches across the Partnerships.