

Cylchlythyr | Circular

HEFCW's regional approach

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: Friday 28 October 2016
Contact: Name: Steve Williams
Telephone: 029 2068 2285
Email: steven.williams@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular sets out new arrangements for HEFCW's regional approach in order to align with the regional priorities set out by Welsh Government following a consultation in 2015.

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Introduction

1. This circular sets out proposed new arrangements for HEFCW's regional approach in order to align with the regional priorities set out by the previous Welsh Government following a consultation in 2015.

Background

2. HEFCW developed an integrated approach to regional planning by requesting that three regional groups of higher education providers in Wales [develop a strategy for the planning and delivery of Higher Education in Wales](#) for the 2010/11 academic year. The regions constituted **North and Mid Wales** (Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Glyndŵr University, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai¹ and the Open University in Wales), **South East Wales** (Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales², Bridgend College and the Open University in Wales) and **South West Wales** (University of Wales Trinity Saint David³, Swansea University, Gower College, Neath Port Talbot College, Pembrokeshire College and the Open University in Wales).
3. In 2011 HEFCW requested that [revised strategies](#) be submitted covering a three year period from 2011/12 to 2013/14. These were subsequently extended for a further year to include 2014/15. These strategies set out:
 - The vision, aims and objectives of the strategies;
 - A summary of high level outcomes of an audit of higher education course provision across the region;
 - Progression routes from post-16 education into higher education and from higher education to other higher education in the region;
 - New higher education provision required in the region;
 - Opportunities for more coordinated widening access activities;
 - Opportunities for joint regional work with employers;
 - Collaborative capital developments and shared services;
 - The governance of the regional partnerships.
4. HEFCW's regional partnerships reported annually on progression against these strategies through Annual Monitoring Statements submitted to HEFCW.
5. HEFCW's remit letters request that HEFCW take consideration of regional coherence when allocating funding. HEFCW more recently has fulfilled this requirement through funding the Reaching Wider Partnerships. HEFCW's remit letter for 2015-16 requested that *“the*

¹ The region included Coleg Llandrillo Cymru as an individual institution prior to its merger with Coleg Menai to become Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

² The region included University of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport as individual institutions.

³ The region included Coleg Sir Gâr, Swansea Metropolitan University and University of Wales Trinity Saint David as individual institutions and Coleg Ceredigion as an associate partner.

Council to recommend that HEIs engage fully with, and take account of, the regional employment and skills plans when making decisions as to where to prioritise higher level skills delivery”.

Welsh Government Regional Priorities

6. The previous Welsh Government published its Skills Policy Statement in January 2014 and its Skills Implementation Plan in July 2014. Those documents highlighted the importance of the regional partnerships in delivering the previous Welsh Government’s skills priorities, also taking consideration of the two city regions in South Wales. Higher education providers are expected to contribute to those priorities through both the regional partnerships and the city regions. Applicants for European funding are encouraged to consult with the regional partnerships to ensure that effective structural funding programmes are delivered.
7. The regional skills partnerships formed under the previous Welsh Government are the [North Wales Economic Ambition Board](#); the South East Wales [Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership \(LSkIP\)](#); and the South West and Central Wales [Regional Learning Partnership \(RLP\)](#). The two city regions are the Cardiff Capital Region and the Swansea Bay City Region. HEFCW is not represented on either the regional skills partnerships or the city regions.
8. Each regional skills partnership is required to submit a regional employment and skills plan to Welsh Government on an annual basis. In 2015 each regional skills partnership was required to complete a supply and demand assessment of the skills needs of its region.
9. In May 2015 the previous Welsh Government published its Higher Education in Further Education review⁴. The review concluded that higher education delivered by colleges was best achieved through collaboration of the further and higher education sectors. However, strategic collaboration in this area was found to be weak and Welsh Government has recommended that: *“HEFCW and Colegau Cymru work with Regional Skills Partnerships to ensure joint strategic planning of higher education in further education delivery between higher education institutions and further education institutions to support the expansion of delivery.”*

Consultation Proposals

10. HEFCW published a consultation in July 2015⁵ that set out proposed changes to HEFCW’s regional approach, to align with the previous Welsh Government’s regional skills partnerships. This was done on the basis that the previous Welsh Government was driving a number of its policies

⁴ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/a-review-of-he-delivered-in-further-education-institutions/?lang=en>

⁵ [HEFCW circular W15/17HE: Consultation on revisions to HEFCW’s regional approach.](#)

through its regional partnerships and that HEFCW's previous regional strategies, aside from the Reaching Wider partnerships, had been largely completed. The proposals set out for consultation in the circular had been discussed in detail with the majority of universities in meetings during 2014/15.

11. HEFCW expects universities and directly funded colleges to contribute to the Welsh Government's regional employment and skills plans and consider how they are able to meet the regional needs.
12. The consultation proposed that HEFCW take forward this area of work by requiring that higher education providers make HEFCW aware of how they were engaging with the Welsh Government's regional priorities. This would be done through two mechanisms:
 - HEFCW's regional partnerships would report, annually, on the contributions made by the partners to the relevant regional skills partnership, with a focus on collaboration;
 - Universities would be invited to report through HEFCW's Strategic Planning and Engagement Document (SPED) how they contribute individually to regional needs.
13. HEFCW recognised that, in some instances, universities and colleges have been meeting the priorities of several regions and therefore HEFCW would expect those providers to be reflected in several reports back to HEFCW.
14. Correspondence to Vice-Chancellors and Principals detailing the extension of the previous strategies proposed that we would expect that providers would report on the extended strategies for 2014/15 through the annual monitoring statement process. The consultation noted that the reporting of these strategies would be delayed until the consultation had been completed.

Consultation Responses

15. There were nine responses to the consultation. Responses were received from Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, Glyndŵr University, Open University, the Regional Learning Partnership, Swansea University and the University of South Wales.
16. Seven consultation responses generally supported the proposals. However, there were reservations in one of those responses which stated that the new approach could not be relied on to capture the range of regional activity undertaken by universities in Wales. One other response highlighted the misalignment between HEFCW's regional structure and Welsh Government's regional structure and two of the responses noted caution about HEFCW's requirements for separate reporting on universities regional contributions.

17. Two of the consultation responses were against the proposals and called for HEFCW to dissolve HEFCW's regional definitions. They have argued that universities were playing into the regional set ups in different ways and that HEFCW's regional structure does not accurately reflect the nature of other regional partnerships so maintaining a HEFCW regional structure would result in duplication of effort. One advised they were contributing across regions and that they were contributing to the developing Growing Mid-Wales agenda which was being taken forward with a view to being the fourth regional skills partnership. One warned that the proposals detracted from universities' regional work beyond the skills and economy agenda. Both suggested that individual university SPED submissions would enable HEFCW to get a better understanding of the range of universities' regional contributions beyond the skills partnerships whilst at the same time allowing universities to highlight where they were working in partnership.

Confirmed regional approach

18. We have considered the consultation responses and, having met separately with Welsh Government officials and the regional skills partnership leads, set out our amended HEFCW's regional approach.
19. As proposed in the consultation it is intended that universities will be encouraged to detail in their SPED process how they are individually meeting broad regional needs beyond the work they are doing with the regional skills partnerships.
20. In addition, rather than requiring a written report from the regional partnerships we will request that higher education providers within each regional skills partnership nominate a representative to meet with HEFCW on a regular basis. These meetings will inform HEFCW how higher education providers are playing into each regional skills partnerships and responding individually and collaboratively to the needs identified by the regional skills partnerships. This should also allow a more flexible response as Welsh Government regional policy evolves.
21. Nominations should be provided to HEFCW no later than **Monday 28 October 2016**. HEFCW will make arrangements to meet with those nominations as soon as the nomination is received.
22. HEFCW will continue to meet with the Welsh Government officials that lead on this area and the regional skills partnership leads on a regular basis. This will allow HEFCW to understand how Welsh Government policy and the regional skills partnerships' needs evolve, as well as to understand their views on higher education providers' contributions to those partnerships.

23. Through collective working with the three regional leads, officers will identify areas where best practice can be identified in order to improve regional working, and work with higher education providers, Welsh Government officials and regional skills partnership leads to disseminate that best practice. This will be considered at a regional and pan-Wales level, as and when appropriate.
24. In order to fully conclude HEFCW's previous approach to regional collaboration, HEFCW will require its regional partnerships produce a final report against their previous objectives in the 2011/12 – 2014/15 regional strategies. These final reports should be submitted to HEFCW by **Monday 28 October 2016**.
25. No funding has been set aside to support the regional agenda aside from the Reaching Wider allocations.

Further information

26. Should you wish to discuss this circular further, please contact Steve Williams (tel 029 2068 2285; email steven.williams@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

27. We will be carrying out an equality impact assessment to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We will also consider the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the higher education sector in Wales. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about equality impact assessments.