

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales

hefcw

**Evaluation of the widening access activities and the
Reaching Wider Initiative in Welsh Higher Education
Institutions**

*Final Report
January 2007*



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Executive Summary

1. INTRODUCTION

This executive summary presents the findings of the evaluation of widening access activities in Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the Reaching Wider initiative. The study was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) in response to the Welsh Assembly Government's request to undertake a sector-wide review of activities aimed at widening access to higher education. It also examines levels of alignment and complementarity between institutional widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.

1.1 Aims of the Evaluation

The specific aims of the study were defined as follows:

- ❑ To investigate the development, progress and impact of both the widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.
- ❑ To consider whether, and if so what, changes should be introduced at national level, at sector-wide level and / or through the Reaching Wider Partnerships, to ensure that progress can be made towards opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society.

1.2 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken between September and December 2006. It was agreed that the evaluation methodology should be designed so as to allow for equal attention to be given to the two elements of the study. The evaluators collected evidence separately in relation to i) institutional widening access activities and, ii) the Reaching Wider initiative. This process involved desk research, a survey of HE institutions and stakeholder organisations and face-to-face interviews, also with institutional representatives and other interested parties.

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO THE EVALUATION

2.1 Widening Access

The first Widening Access Strategies, in their current format, were submitted by HEIs in February 2001. HEFCW encourages HEIs to develop strategies that take account of their individual missions and circumstances and complement overall institutional strategic plans.

HEFCW requires institutions to submit widening access strategies on a triennial basis. The last complete three-year strategy cycle was for the period 2002/03 to 2004/05, and was subsequently extended to cover 2005/06. During the course of this evaluation, institutions have submitted new strategies for the period 2006/07 to 2008/09, which have a greater focus

on the four Reaching Wider target groups. Guidance issued by HEFCW notes that new institutional widening access strategies should identify:

- how the institution's widening access mission fits into the institution's overall mission;
- progress to date in meeting institutional targets;
- short and medium term plans and priorities.

2.2 The Reaching Wider Initiative

The Reaching Wider initiative was established with a remit to drive progress towards the attainment of the four *Reaching Higher* widening access target groups. Following the publication of *Reaching Higher*, the Welsh Assembly Government announced an additional £2m available in 2002/03 to establish regional partnerships to drive forward the widening access activities in a regionally coordinated manner. Subsequently four regional Partnerships submitted funding proposals (North Wales, West and Mid Wales, South West Wales and South East Wales). As well as representatives from HEIs the Partnerships include senior representatives from further education and schools and some also include community and voluntary organisations, local education authorities and Careers Wales. Allocations of approximately £2m each year have been made from 2003/04 to the present.

3 EVALUATION OF WIDENING ACCESS ACTIVITIES

Widening access to higher education is a key priority for the Welsh Assembly Government and is consistent with other attempts to promote equal opportunities and equality of access to educational opportunities. However attempts to develop a universally agreed definition of widening access activities are problematic as the range and nature of widening access cohorts vary widely. This issue is further clouded by the fact that institutions develop widening access provision in response to particular regional socio-economic needs, within the context of their individual institutional missions and strategies. These factors need to be taken into consideration when measuring and evaluating widening access progress and impact achieved across the higher education sector.

3.1 Institutional Strategies

Institutional strategies relating to Widening Access vary widely across the sector, largely due to the complexities of defining widening access cohorts and the need to respond to needs on the basis noted above. They range from the specific targeting of groups to the development of partnerships both within the local community and Wales-wide as well as the incorporation of widening access as a central element of the overall strategic mission of the institution.

The majority of institutions listed recruitment and admissions, followed closely by learning and teaching, as aspects of their institutional planning directly linked to their widening access strategy. Examples of linkages between learning and teaching and widening access included outreach work, with specific learning opportunities and modules designed to cater for the needs of off-campus learners. In addition, institutions stated that staff development also linked into their widening access strategies and activities. Examples of staff development largely involved awareness-raising relating to equality issues and the needs of disabled students.

3.2 Implementing Widening Access Strategies

Most institutions reported that the focus of their widening access strategy and activities were targeted equally across all departments and faculties across the institution, with many also reporting that all departments were responsible for delivering and monitoring their own widening access activities. HEIs have generally adopted either a devolved model or a more centralised approach to developing widening access strategies. A centralised approach can work equally well within institutions that have a strong commitment to widening access across all departments as it does within those that do not. However, a devolved implementation approach does offer the opportunity to encourage greater ownership and buy-in across departments in situations where increased staff commitment to widening access is required.

3.3 Student Support and Retention

The majority of institutions reported that, in working towards their widening access strategy objectives, they offered a range of student support services including an institution-wide student support officer, a network of student support staff, drop-in centres and support sessions, either on a one-to-one or group basis and study skills advice. Many of these student support activities are funded through widening access premium allocations, although the provision is available to all students. In almost all cases, however, it was reported that the majority of students who access these student support services are from low participation backgrounds. From the evidence presented by HEIs during the course of this evaluation it would appear that successful interventions have been informed by institutional analysis of its own student data on non-completion and audits into the primary causes of non-completion.

3.4 Providing Effective Support

Most institutions were of the opinion that activities that provide intensive support to small targeted groups offer the most effective widening access support. It was generally considered that this is the most effective way of engaging 'hard to reach' groups and that individuals within certain groups, such as those with disabilities and those leaving care, may require further intensive support. It does appear that activities which are most tailored to the specific needs of target groups, and therefore avoid a blanket approach, seem to be held in the highest esteem by both practitioners and beneficiaries.

3.5 Targeting and Monitoring Widening Access Activities

In general HEIs set their own targets in relation to recognising and prioritising widening access target groups. These target groups are influenced by their own recruitment patterns, their regional and national catchment areas, Welsh Assembly Government targets, UK-wide performance indicators, national priorities and legal requirements. In relation to data sources and institutional analysis that have informed widening access strategy development, most institutions cited the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation as a key dataset, particularly in relation to activities targeting Communities First areas. The majority of survey respondents also noted that widening access work has been informed by the analysis of their own student cohorts.

3.6 Impact and Added Value

Although some evidence illustrating outcomes and impact was presented during the course of this evaluation it is clear that some HEIs are able to measure the impact of their widening access provision more robustly than others. Relatively little data or records of participation rates (beyond anecdotal evidence) relating to individual activities aimed at widening access was presented during the course of the evaluation. This lack of robust evidence concurs with similar higher education sector research and evaluation findings produced in England. Given that there is currently no consistent widening access monitoring and impact assessment process across the HE sector in Wales, as is the case with other UK regions, it is difficult to confidently report on the medium to long-term impact of widening access activities in a consistent manner across the sector.

4 EVALUATION OF THE REACHING WIDER INITIATIVE

Reaching Wider Partnerships are required to develop and deliver collaborative targeted widening access provision to raise the aspirations and educational skills of the four all-age widening access groups identified in *Reaching Higher*. While it was considered that individual institutions will continue to be the drivers in terms of widening access on a sector-wide basis there was general agreement that continuing collaboration in terms of the four target groups and delivery through Partnerships should remain, as this structure adds value to current provision. It is clear that HEIs are well placed to drive forward the Partnerships' priorities, although other partners clearly play an important role in planning, developing and implementing initiatives.

4.1 Reaching Wider and Prioritising Target Groups

According to evidence presented to the evaluators, focusing Reaching Wider resources on a relatively narrow set of groups is considered to be the most appropriate basis upon which to operate on a Partnership level. Channelling, what were seen as, limited resources on a narrow set of target groups would, in the opinion of those consulted, have a greater impact than would be the case if they were spread more thinly over a much broader strategic focus. There was however some disagreement regarding the suitability of some of the groups and there were some calls that individual Partnerships should be allowed to determine which groups should be targeted in order to reflect local needs to a greater extent.

4.2 Effectiveness of the Partnerships

Institutions were almost all strongly supportive of the regional nature of the Reaching Wider initiative and many considered themselves to be enthusiastic and active supporters of the regional concept and believed it was the most effective way of meeting the needs of all target groups. The effectiveness of the Partnerships is also reflected in the range of activities which they provide. Examples include aspiration and awareness raising activities to school pupils where the contributions of the HEIs within the Partnerships have enabled a diverse range of study areas and student experiences to be delivered to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Partnerships have also promoted a high level of buy-in from HEIs, FE colleges and other participating groups, encouraging commitment to sharing practices engendering a collaborative approach to working. In addition, the absence of short-term competitive recruitment pressures enables them to consider the longer term needs of learners, for example skills development, motivation and educational aspiration-raising, and not only the 'quick fix' solutions that will increase short term enrolment levels.

4.3 Funding Reaching Wider

The fact that Reaching Wider funding has been, until recently, allocated on an annual basis was highlighted as a key issue facing all Partnerships. This, it was reported, has served to create uncertainty among those employed by the Partnerships. Concerns were also raised as to the degree to which short term funding can lead to risk aversion, particularly in relation to adopting innovative approaches and developing new areas of activity. From 2006/07 some progress has been made with the allocation of two year funding to 2008/9 with HEFCW and the Assembly working towards rolling funding allocations.

4.4 Impact and Added Value

Many of the activities supported by the Reaching Wider initiative have been focused around raising awareness, as well as raising skills levels, among younger age cohorts and community groups who are some way off accessing higher education in the immediate future. The Reaching Wider Partnerships assess activities through a series of assessments and measures, both 'hard' and 'soft'. Soft measures include awareness raising, capacity building, community links and the development of trust. Hard measures include progression through the educational systems and costs/numbers of students. These measures are used to ensure the Partnerships are adding value and avoiding duplication and are overseen through the Partnership committees.

Many institutions noted that the additional funding provided through Reaching Wider has enabled the development of a range of new activities aimed at the target groups. To support this claim, positive progress has been made in relation to the number of individuals accessing higher education across all four target groups. The degree to which Partnerships have avoided unnecessary duplication of activities was also considered to be an example of added value. This, it was claimed, was a result of good communications between partners and joint coordination of activities. However it was suggested by a number of institutions that there needs to be more of a focus of potential collaborative work and dissemination of results across the whole of Wales.

5 Progress towards targets

Proportional increases in higher education enrolment are being recorded across the four target groups in each of the Partnership regions, although proportional enrolment increases for Communities First areas are forecast to plateau off during the run up to 2010. Responsibility for achieving Reaching Wider targets is not the sole responsibility of Reaching Wider Partnerships. However, if Partnerships are to be motivated to continue to contribute to the positive progress currently being made, then there is a need to expand the focus of the target period beyond 2010 and support this with longer term funding proposals.

6 COMPLIMENTARITY AND ALIGNMENT

Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs have achieved alignment between Reaching Wider and Widening Access by ensuring that activities supported by the two funding sources do not duplicate efforts targeted at similar groups. This is particularly evident from examples where Reaching Wider Initiatives have focused on younger age cohorts, mostly under 16, while widening access activities have supported older age groups, particularly those that are closest to accessing higher education.

7 YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION FROM A CARE BACKGROUND

It was unanimously agreed across all institutions that addressing the barriers to higher education faced by individuals leaving care should be given a high priority. However none of the HEIs have, to date, developed a comprehensive policy relating to young people leaving care and there was widespread acknowledgement that any policies would require wide multi-agency and cross-sector partnership approaches. A number of institutions noted that the development of such a policy is now being considered and some noted this as a priority area within their 2006/2009 widening access strategy. Some institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships have already taken some initial steps to create linkages with appropriate organisations and in so doing have encountered some early challenges particularly in relation to engaging with relevant individuals.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Widening Access activities

Recommendation 1

Systematic monitoring and tracking of beneficiaries should be an integral part of institutions' widening access strategies. Monitoring and tracking can assist individual institutions in informing the development of future activities, by helping to identify those activities that have had a positive impact on participation among under-represented groups.

Lead: HEIs.

Recommendation 2

HEFCW should work closely with HESA and the Welsh Assembly Government in keeping informed of current developments under the *Managing Information Across Partners* (MIAP) programme which is being led by DfES and partners. In the longer term the outcomes of this programme should inform HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government in developing the most appropriate approach to ensure consistency and alignment of different sources of information in Wales. This could identify how to overcome any current barriers to understanding the progression routes of statutory school-age pupils through post-16 education and training and on to higher education.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government jointly with HEFCW and HESA

Recommendation 3

HEIs should be encouraged to conduct their own detailed monitoring into the causes of non-completion as a means of informing innovative approaches to student support. Generic findings from current audits carried out by individual institutions should be shared across the sector, possibly through the newly established Widening Access Committee.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

Recommendation 4

Individual institutions have developed a number of widening access strategy development and funding allocation models. The Widening Access Committee (WAC) should consider, and make recommendations to HEFCW, on how best to disseminate information relating to the merits of each of these models to enable institutions to adopt the one that is most suitable and favourable to them. The WAC should also consider ways of optimising the degree of funding accountability demonstrated by HEIs for their widening access activities.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee*

Recommendation 5

Institutions may want to ensure that widening access strategies include internal monitoring and evaluation systems which enable them to assess the effects and impacts of their activities. Building on progress to date, effective monitoring activities could capture both quantitative data on progression rates, but also qualitative outcomes related to attitudes and perceptions and nurturing trust with under-represented communities.

Lead: All HE Institutions

Reaching Wider Recommendations**Recommendation 6**

In light of calls from Partnerships for greater autonomy to focus on target areas that reflect local needs all Reaching Wider Partnerships should first of all reconfirm their commitment to meeting all Reaching Higher widening access targets. However, Partnerships should also be offered the flexibility to prioritise their targeted activities through discussions with HEFCW. This would enable Partnerships to focus on areas of activity which are most likely to result in greater impacts. The National Coordinator should, therefore, work with Partnerships to identify their specific strengths in relation to the targets, and how these can best serve the needs of their regions.

Lead: Reaching Wider National Coordinator and Chairs of Reaching Wider Partnerships

Recommendation 7

HEFCW should review the configuration of the Partnerships, including the suitability of the current regional structure of Partnerships, in more depth to identify approaches that offer the most effective contributions to the Reaching Higher widening access targets.

Lead: HEFCW

Funding**Recommendation 8**

The Welsh Assembly Government should consider releasing Reaching Wider funding into HEFCW's mainstream budget to 2010 to enable the Funding Council to have greater control over the management and flow of funding. Failing this the Welsh Assembly Government should at least confirm that Reaching Wider funding will be available to 2010.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government

Recommendation 9

Should funding for Reaching Wider Partnerships be extended beyond 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW should consider providing longer term funding, possibly allocating funds on a rolling three-year basis.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government

Cross-cutting recommendations**Recommendation 10**

Examples of good practice should be identified and disseminated more widely across the sector. The HEFCW coordinated Reaching Wider national conference and the Widening Access Committee should be the main forums for this dissemination.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

Recommendation 11

Both Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual institutions should take steps to address the all-age remit of the Reaching Higher widening access targets and ensure that adult learners, including those already in employment are targeted more pro-actively through a range of widening access activities.

Lead: Reaching Wider Partnerships and HEIs

Recommendations relating to young people entering higher education from a care background**Recommendation 12**

All higher education institutions in Wales should actively consider adopting the 'Going to University from Care' recommendations outlined by the Frank Buttle Trust.

Lead: All HE institutions

Recommendation 13

Further research, reviews and dissemination of good practice nationally and internationally is required in order to gain an understanding of how multi-agency partnerships can be formed to work collaboratively to address the needs of young people entering HE from a care background.

Lead: Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs

Recommendation 14

Further awareness raising and staff development is also required across all higher and further education institutions and colleges across Wales in order to ensure that staff are aware of the specific needs of people from a background of care and equipped with the knowledge and skills to address them.

Lead: HEFCW & individual HEI/FEI

Recommendation 15

Institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships should work with relevant regional and national care agencies to ensure that optimum support is offered to students and that this support is consistent both during and outside term-time. Furthermore, efforts should be taken to ensure that relevant agencies continue to offer equivalent support to students from a care background..

Lead: HEIs and Reaching Wider Partnerships

Recommendation 16

HEIs, and FEIs providing higher education, should raise awareness of and support students with a care background to obtain the range of additional support available and introduce systems that record and monitor information on this cohort of students.

Lead: HEIs

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative in Welsh Higher Education institutions. The study was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) in response to the Welsh Assembly Government's request to

*'take stock of whether, and if so what, changes should be introduced at national level and through Reaching Wider partnerships so as to ensure that we can maintain progress towards progressively opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society. A report on your conclusions should be submitted by January 2007' I will expect this advice to include whether further specific steps should be taken to reflect the particular circumstances of young people entering HE having been in care.'*¹

The evaluation was remitted to investigate the development, progress and impact of widening access funded activities in Welsh higher education institutions. It also examines levels of alignment and complementarity between institutional widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.

1.1 Aims of the evaluation

The specific aims of the study were defined as follows:

- ❑ To investigate the development, progress and impact of both the widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.
- ❑ To consider whether, and if so what, changes should be introduced at national level, at sector-wide level and / or through the Reaching Wider Partnerships, to ensure that progress can be made towards opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society².

The evaluation's remit did not include issues of quality, specific issues related to student financial support or the wider impact on institutions of diversifying student cohorts.

It is hoped that the findings from this research will help ensure that future policy development is underpinned by a robust and objective evaluation of activities to date.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was undertaken between September and December 2006. The need to ensure that equal weight was given to both widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative was an early consideration in the evaluation process. It was agreed

¹ Extract from 2006-07 Remit Letter issued by the Welsh Assembly Government to HEFCW

² A full list of the evaluation aims and objectives are listed in Annex 1.

between HEFCW and Arad that the evaluation methodology should consider, separately, the two distinct parts to the work (i) institutional widening access activities and, ii) the Reaching Wider initiative during the evidence collection processes. This report provides an analysis of each component individually as well as an overview and analysis of cross-cutting issues.

Short case studies are also included to illustrate the type of activities currently undertaken. The nature of activities outlined in these case studies are not exclusive to the institutions to which they relate nor do they necessarily demonstrate examples of best practice. They are included merely as illustrative tools to demonstrate the diversity of widening access activities currently being supported across Wales.

SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The remit of the evaluation, and timescale within which the work has taken place, has dictated that the study has taken a strategic overview and has focused on issues at a broad, national level. Widening access activities and the Reaching Wider initiative impact upon, and are influenced by, a wide range of other issues and activities across the higher education sector, including retention and student support, part-time study, teaching and learning and institutional collaboration. We have attempted to reflect this through our approach to the evaluation which has invited HE representatives to consider the issue of widening access and participation within the context of their institution's overall mission and Wales-wide national priorities. The Welsh Assembly Government 2006-07 remit letter to HEFCW included a request that the funding council 'take stock during 2006' of what changes should be introduced to maintain progress towards 'progressively opening higher education opportunities to all parts of our society.'

As noted above, the remit letter also included a specific request that advice relating to change should include whether further steps should be taken to 'reflect the particular circumstances of young people entering higher education having been in care'³. Although the issues relating to young people entering higher education from a background in care is still a comparatively new issue for many higher education institutions in Wales, this evaluation has paid particular focus to them. The findings demonstrate that there are lessons to be drawn from good practice that is being established across the sector and initiatives at a UK level.

PROCESS

There were three components to the evidence collection. Firstly, a review of relevant reports, papers (including key policy and emerging widening access strategy documents) and data was carried out to provide the background and context to the evaluation. A full list of references and documents consulted is included in Annex 2.

Secondly the evaluation collected the main body of evidence through interviews undertaken during October and November 2006. Arad met with representatives from all HEIs, including the Open University in Wales to discuss institutional approaches and strategies. We also met with all Chairs and Managers of the each of the four Reaching Wider Partnerships and held focus groups with representatives of two of the four partnerships. Where it was not possible

³ Further details relating to the remit letter 2006-07 are available in Annex 3.

to convene focus groups with Partnerships, the partner organisations were invited to submit written comments. Members of the team also met and held discussions with representatives from HEFCW, the Welsh Assembly Government, NIACE Dysgu Cymru and The National Union of Students Wales.

Thirdly, the interviews and desk research evidence was supported by information collected through a survey. All HEIs and FEIs in Wales were invited to respond to a questionnaire which was also distributed to Reaching Wider Partnership staff. Other key organisations related to higher education and lifelong learning were also invited to respond, including the Welsh Assembly Government, Higher Education Wales, UALL Cymru and the Workers Educational Association. Arad received responses from 19 respondents in total including all 12 HE institutions and 7 FE institutions. (A copy of the questionnaire used in the survey is included in Annex 4). In addition, written submissions were received from a range of other individuals and interested parties such as Reaching Wider project officers and students who had previously been beneficiaries of widening access activities.

As the survey was targeted towards a relatively small, but particularly relevant, sample of respondents, survey findings are presented within this report as the actual number of institutions responding to each question. This approach is adopted since presenting data as percentages based on small samples would be inappropriate as they would not produce statistically significant results.

Further to this, valuable evidence and information was also obtained by attending conferences and events that took place during October and November, notably the UALL Cymru conference, the inaugural meeting of the Widening Access Committee and the Care Leavers in Higher Education Conference, organised by the Frank Buttle Trust and HEFCW.

The evaluation team assembled a considerable body of evidence during the time available and we are extremely grateful to all those who took the time to contribute to the evaluation.

2 Background and context to the evaluation

When evaluating development, progress and impact of widening access activities it is first necessary to note that not all institutions and organisations share the same interpretation and definitions relating to under-represented groups, people with disabilities, individuals with learning difficulties or people from socially disadvantage backgrounds. Furthermore, the culture and social conditions within which higher education institutions are located vary considerably. These factors, in turn, greatly influence how institutions and organisations define widening access cohorts and, therefore, the widening access activities developed to address their needs. It is not possible therefore, when referring to the widening access activities of individual HEIs, to contextualise evaluation findings within a closed definition of widening access cohorts. This is not an issue that is confined to Wales and is equally applicable to the UK as whole as well as other European regions as recognised by Johansson et al (2005)⁴.

Defining targeted widening access groups within the context of the Reaching Wider initiative is more straightforward, as the Reaching Wider Partnerships are funded specifically to address the needs of four target groups, namely disabled individuals, individuals from black and minority ethnic groups, Communities First areas and students pursuing at least part of their higher education through the medium of Welsh.

2.1 Widening Access: Policy and Funding

Individual HEIs have focused on widening access issues and have developed strategies to address them over a relatively long period of time. The first Widening Access Strategies, in the current format, were submitted in February 2001 and the strategies have since moved to a three year reporting cycle. Prior to 2001, some institutions were funded for specific continuing education provision including premium funding.

Institutional Widening Access Strategies have generally been set within the context of an institution's regional mission and overall strategic plan, and focus on a range of potential students considered to be from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds. HEFCW circulars and guidance have made this explicit, and have emphasised that: *'an institution's strategy will reflect its own mission and circumstances. It will decide its policies and programmes in the light of these.'*⁵

In 2002, the Welsh Assembly Government published *Reaching Higher*, the national strategy for higher education, which acknowledged the Welsh HE sector's strong record in attracting and retaining students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds. However, *Reaching Higher* also noted that "too many people who could potentially benefit from HE still believe that higher education is not for them". In recognition of this, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has continued to develop policies and funding

⁴ 'Bridging the Gap: Comparing actions for widening participation in higher education in Sweden and England 2005', M. Johansson et al (2005)

⁵ From 'Widening Access to Higher Education Strategies 2002', Circular W02/40HE (June 2002)

approaches that encourage institutions to further develop a strategic approach to widening access.

HEFCW requires institutions to submit widening access strategies on a triennial basis. The last complete three-year strategy cycle was for the period 2002/03 to 2004/05, and was subsequently extended to cover 2005/06. While this evaluation has been taking place, institutions have submitted new strategies for the period 2006/07 to 2008/09, which have a greater focus on the four Reaching Wider target groups. Guidance issued by HEFCW notes that new institutional widening access strategies should identify:

- how the institution's widening access mission fits into the institution's overall mission;
- progress to date in meeting institutional targets;
- short and medium term plans and priorities.

FUNDING FOR WIDENING ACCESS ACTIVITIES

Widening access strategies are supported by a number of distinct HEFCW funding streams. These include funding streams which are specifically designed to promote widening access and funds which assist widening access but aren't designed exclusively for that purpose.

A broad categorisation of these various funds might look like this:

CATEGORY 1: FUNDING INTENDED TO SUPPORT WIDENING ACCESS SPECIFICALLY

Funding allocations for 2006/07 have been sourced from HEFCW circulars.

- **Widening Access Premium Funding** (allocation for 2006/07 - £5.5 million) NOTE: includes Communities First Premium and Funding to Support Students with Non-Traditional Qualifications. This funding is intended to recognise the extra costs incurred in recruiting, supporting and retaining students of all ages from backgrounds without a tradition of HE. Therefore, premium funding is normally directed at targeted admissions arrangements, targeted recruitment campaigns and appropriate support and counselling services.
- **Widening Access Fund** (allocation for 2006/07 - £1.7 million) are calculated on the basis of the number of 'low affluence' postcode student enrolments, in each institution, which are eligible for the Widening Access Premium. Ninety per cent of the available funding is allocated pro-rata to an institution's 'low affluence' student enrolments and ten per cent pro-rata to the percentage of the institutions' total eligible enrolments which the 'low affluence' enrolments represent.
- **Premium Funding for Students with Disabilities** (allocation for 2006/07 - £0.6 million). is based on the number of students at each institution in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance.
- **Financial Contingency Funds** (allocation for 2006/07 - £5.1 million). These are grants issued by institutions to those whose access to higher education might be inhibited by

financial considerations or who, for whatever reason, including physical or other disabilities, face financial difficulties associated with their living costs.

- **Part-time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme:** (funding available for 2006/07 - £1 million). The part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme offers fee remission for students who are unemployed and actively seeking work or who are in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions benefits. It is designed to serve as an instrument for helping to combat social exclusion and to assist more people to obtain vocational qualifications. As such the scheme is intended to contribute towards widening participation, improving access and increasing rates of retention and achievement.

CATEGORY 2: FUNDING THAT BENEFITS WIDENING ACCESS ACTIVITIES BUT IS NOT SPECIFICALLY DEDICATED TO THAT PURPOSE

2006/07 allocations are not itemised as these funds are allocated for other, non-widening access purposes by institutions.

- **One Semester Completions:** funding which reflects the number of students who complete a short period of time at an institution.
- **Per Capita Funding:** A fixed amount to support the administrative costs of enrolling students which, given that the fee is the same for both part-time and full-time students, benefits part time students, which includes widening access students.
- **Support for Welsh medium provision:** is allocated through several distinct funding streams, including the Welsh Medium Premium, the Welsh Medium Provision Fund for institutional Welsh medium strategies and support for the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Centre.

There are other funding streams, including core funding allocated for teaching and learning, which benefits all students, including those from under-represented groups. However, it is not feasible, to list all funding streams here.

2.2 The Reaching Wider (RW) initiative: background

Reaching Higher announced £2 million would be available in 2002-03 to help institutions promote widening access activities in Communities First areas and other deprived communities. Following this, further detail was provided on the purpose of the fund: to establish regional partnerships to develop targeted widening access activities in a regionally coordinated manner. In her letter to the sector in July 2002, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (now Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills), Jane Davidson, set out the parameters for the Reaching Wider initiative funding, making explicit that it was to be used to encourage HEIs to embrace the collaboration agenda. The Minister also noted:

'I wish to see the funding used to encourage innovative and possibly large-scale projects which would draw in a number of partners. We would expect the partnerships to contribute to building the continuum of learning and increase access from schools

and other providers to HEIs, whilst simultaneously helping to lift standards and performance with providers themselves.⁶

Subsequently four regional Partnerships submitted funding proposals (North Wales, West and Mid Wales, South West Wales and South East Wales). Allocations of approximately £2m each year have been made from 2003/04 to the present. Full details of allocations by partnerships are provided in the tables below.

Table 1: Allocation of funding to Reaching Wider Partnerships (2002 – 2006)

Partnership	Funding Allocation £		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3 ⁷ 16 month period
North Wales	450,000	450,000	600,000
West and Mid Wales	450,000	517,500	600,000
South West Wales	300,000 ⁸	165,000 ⁹	316,000
South East Wales/ First Campus	650,000	717,500	950,000
Central Co-ordination	100,000	100,000	100,000
Total	1,950,000	1,950,000	2,566,000

Source: HEFCW

Table 2: Cumulative funding to Reaching Wider Partnerships (2002-2006)

Partnership	Cumulative Funding £ April 02-July06	Percentage of total funding (%)
North Wales	1,500,000	23.2
West and Mid Wales	1,567,500	24.2
South West Wales	781,000	12.1
South East Wales/ First Campus	2,317,500	35.8
Central Co-ordination	300,000	4.6
Total	6,466,000	

Source: HEFCW

In year one of the Reaching Wider initiative, HEFCW contacted Partnerships to request that they focus their attention on activities designed to help widen participation among the four *Reaching Higher* target groups. However, this steer emerged only after the Partnerships had been formed and funded. Furthermore subsequent additional requests have been placed upon the Partnerships and the Welsh Assembly Government recently published outcomes for Higher Education in the *Vision into Action* (November 2006).

⁶ Welsh Assembly Government remit letter to HEFCW, 2002-03

⁷ In year 3 Reaching Wider Partnerships are funded for a 16-month period, this was in response to Partnerships requesting a longer funding period.

⁸ An allocation of 18 months was made to the South West Wales Partnership in the first funding period.

⁹ An allocation of 6 months was made to the South West Wales Partnership in the second funding period to align it with the other Partnerships.

Table 3: Welsh Assembly Government Targets for Widening Access	
Communities First	The percentage of all Welsh domiciled undergraduate new entrants to HE courses at UK HEIs or FEIs who are domiciled in the Welsh Communities First areas to rise from 8.9% in 2000/01 to 11.4% in 2010/11.
Welsh Medium	The proportion of HE students in Welsh HEIs and FEIs undertaking some element of their HE course through the medium of Welsh to increase from 3.4% in 2000/01 to 7% in 2010/11 ¹⁰ .
Minority Ethnic Communities	No specific target set.
Students with Disabilities	No specific target set.

The Assembly's Reaching Higher targets are all-age targets, an approach which contrasts with the widening participation target (18–30 year olds) people in England. HEFCW's strategic priorities for widening access are set out annually in the remit letter issued by the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills to the Funding Council. A number of specific requirements have been made by the Minister in relation to widening access in recent years and these are listed in Annex 3.

COLLABORATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY

The Partnerships have been required by the Welsh Assembly Government to plan and deliver activities collaboratively. Therefore, HEFCW has been keen to encourage HEIs to adopt an increasingly co-ordinated approach to institutional widening access funded activity, aligning their activities with those of their regional Partnership. To support alignment, in April 2006, HEFCW provided an additional £750k to institutions to produce articulation strategies demonstrating the alignment between HEIs' widening access activities and regional Partnership provision and to meet other widening access priorities.

2.3 Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers in Higher Education

HEFCW's 2006-07 remit letter also requested that advice be provided on "whether further specific steps should be taken to reflect the particular circumstances of young people entering HE having been in care". The widening access priorities mentioned above, as well as those funded through the £750K articulation strategy, include support to young people from care. However, this evaluation has provided an opportunity to gain an overall understanding of the support and assistance provided by HEIs to 'looked after young people' and care leavers.

¹⁰ Welsh medium was not an original target and the targets have since been revised within the Welsh Assembly Government's strategic plan *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*

People from a care background are a priority group that has recently received increasing attention from the Welsh Assembly Government. Of particular relevance are the recommendations of the Frank Buttle Trust *Going to University from Care* report, which propose actions for HEIs which are listed in Annex 5. In response to this increasing attention and the requests of the remit letter outlined above, HEFCW requested that HEIs, in formulating their new widening access strategies, consider the policy developments and support for looked after children alongside their other work with under-represented groups.

3 Evaluation of widening access activities

In essence widening access is about providing equal opportunities across race, language, gender and social background. However, as noted earlier, attempts to develop a summarised definition of widening access are difficult as the range and nature of widening access cohorts vary widely. This issue is further clouded by the fact that institutions develop widening access provision in response to particular regional socio-economic needs, within the context of their individual institutional missions and strategies. These factors need to be taken into consideration when measuring and evaluating widening access progress and impact achieved across the higher education sector.

3.1 Development and progress

Institutional strategies relating to widening access vary widely across the sector, largely due to the complexities of defining widening access cohorts and the different strategic priorities of HEIs in Wales. They range from the specific targeting of groups to the development of partnerships both within the local community and Wales-wide, and the incorporation of widening access as a central element of the overall strategic mission of the institution. Short and longer-term strategies also vary depending upon the nature of the institution, their strategic plan for widening access and their performance against government targets. HEIs use a range of different targets and indicators based on their own data collection, Welsh Assembly Government Reaching Wider targets, UK national performance indicators and the location of their institution and needs of the local community.

The degree to which institutions focus on widening access within their overall strategic missions is evident from their strategic plans. One institution noted that three of its seven institutional mission statements refer to widening access and many other HEIs in Wales can make a similar claim. Most institutions consulted said that widening access strategic development was embedded within their overall strategic plans. Within some strategic plans institutions highlight the fact that a widening access ethos underpins all of their activity.

Although all HEIs in Wales have social responsibilities and all institutions support widening access activities, some HEIs in Wales consider their widening access activities to form a core part of their overall corporate social responsibilities. Widening access activities can be said to promote access to, and exploitation of, knowledge for the benefit of the social, cultural and economic development of communities, and therefore overlap with some Third Mission activities. Some HEIs have a long standing history of prioritising widening access and ensuring that it is integral to their overall mission and their position within their local communities.

In many instances widening access objectives compete for time and resources with other institutional strategic objectives such as increasing research excellence. Managing varied objectives is an issue for most institutions and would explain why widening access is given a high priority in some institutions and less of a priority in others. The evaluation also found that institutions are exploring new approaches to planning and implementing widening access activities. Several institutions reported during consultations that they were planning to

develop outreach activities and stronger links with public and voluntary bodies as part of an overall increase in their widening access activities.

Survey respondents were asked which aspects of their institutional planning directly linked into their widening access strategy (see table 4 below). The vast majority of respondents listed recruitment and admissions, followed closely by learning and teaching. Examples of linkages between learning and teaching and widening access included outreach work, with specific learning opportunities and modules designed to cater for the needs of off-campus learners.

Table 4: Aspects of institutional planning which are directly linked to Widening Access Strategies

Which of the following aspects of institutional planning are directly linked into your Widening Access Strategy	Yes		No		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE	All	HE
Learning and teaching	16	11	0	0	3	1
Staff development	13	9	0	0	6	3
Research	11	8	1	1	7	3
Recruitment and admissions	16	12	0	0	3	0
Library and information services	11	9	1	1	7	2

Source: Evaluation survey

School liaison officers often play a key role in creating links between recruitment and admissions and widening access activities. Examples of activities included:

- the development of compact agreements between some HEIs and sixth forms; publications aimed at clarifying institutional admissions policy and;
- presenting information in more user-friendly formats and adopting clearer, more accessible terminology.

In addition, most respondents claimed that staff development also linked into their widening access strategies and activities and that in many cases it was reported that this staff development would continue to be a focus during the strategy period (2006/09). Examples of staff development largely included awareness-raising relating to equality issues and the needs of disabled students.

One institution noted that although it had developed previous widening access strategy plans, mainly in response to HEFCW funding requirements, the planning around the strategy had, until recently, been unfocussed. As a result it was considered that some widening access opportunities have in the past been overlooked or not pursued to the extent to which they could have. The institution also went on to note however, that at the same time a number of other activities which have not been resourced by widening access funding, particularly those linked directly with schools, addressed widening access issues, even though they had not at the time been recognised as widening access activities. This has been due to a lack of

awareness across the institution in the past as to what constitutes widening access-related activities. Even though steps have now been taken within the institution in question to address the issues noted above, the degree of awareness relating to widening access activities within HEIs across Wales remains varied. Indeed in three of the institutions consulted raising awareness of widening access within their own institution has been a key part of the widening access funded activities to date, and several institutions considered that more work will be required to raise internal awareness in the future.

PRIORITISING REACHING HIGHER WIDENING ACCESS TARGET GROUPS AND OTHER UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Most institutions set their own targets in relation to recognising and prioritising widening access. These target groups were developed from their strategies and influenced by their own recruitment experiences, their regional and national catchment areas, Welsh Assembly Government targets, UK-wide performance indicators, national priorities and legal requirements (such as the Disability Statements). The survey results in table 5 below confirm that, in response to the Reaching Higher targets, all HEIs have prioritised Communities First groups. Indeed it would appear that HEIs are increasingly placing a higher focus on all the Reaching Wider target groups. While this is encouraging in relation to progress towards the 2010 *Reaching Higher* targets, some respondents raised concerns that narrowing the focus of widening access activities resulted in other widening access cohorts (e.g. social classes 4 and 5 that live outside Communities First areas) being overlooked.

Table 5: The level of priority given to targeting groups of individuals within current widening access policy, strategy and activity (1 =no priority – 5 = very high priority)

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Individuals from Communities First areas	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	1	14	11	1	0
Black and other minority ethnic groups	1	1	1	0	5	2	5	3	6	6	1	0
Disabled people	0	0	0	0	5	2	6	5	7	5	1	0
Welsh speakers	0	0	2	1	7	4	2	2	7	5	1	0

Source: evaluation survey

Most institutions have also placed a relatively high priority on work with disabled students. Prioritising work with black and other minority ethnic communities has been greater in HEIs in more urban areas (see case study 1), where concentrations of BME communities are highest, whilst the focus on Welsh medium provision has been greater in some rurally-located HEIs.

Case Study – Overseas Qualification Advice Day - University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC)

In 2006 UWIC hosted an Overseas Qualifications Advice Day, organised in partnership with the South Riverside Community Development Centre and the Welsh Refugee Council and funded by NIACE Dysgu Cymru. The event aimed to raise awareness of education opportunities in Cardiff for refugees and people from ethnic minority backgrounds, who had gained qualifications overseas and needed advice about comparing them to UK standards. The event included a number of workshops designed to facilitate entry into the UK educational system.

Examples of other groups targeted by institutions within their widening access activities include worked-based learners, individuals from low participation backgrounds (other than Communities First), disengaged youth, migrant workers and individuals from families without a tradition of higher education experience. Some smaller institutions reported that they could sometimes be overwhelmed by the need to respond to a wide range of national and regional priorities.

The survey also examined the student age range within HEIs widening access provision. Survey respondents were asked about the priority placed upon different age cohorts within institutional widening access activities. The results shown in table 6 below demonstrate that whilst some emphasis is placed on a range of age groups, the main emphasis is placed on the 14 to 19 age group, particularly the 16 – 18 age group i.e. pre-HE entry cohorts

Table 6: Level of priority given to targeting different age groups within current widening access policy, strategy and activity (1 =no priority – 5 = very high priority)

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Under 14 year olds	3	1	4	4	5	3	4	3	1	1	2	0
14 to 19 year olds	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	15	10	1	0
Over 19s and under 25	1	1	0	0	1	1	5	4	10	6	2	0
Over 25 year olds	1	1	0	0	3	3	3	2	10	6	2	0

Source: evaluation survey

There is considerably less focus on the under 14 age group compared to the 14-19 age group across individual HEIs, despite the fact that many HEIs recognised during interviews that there was a need to target this age cohort. Some institutions commented that they tended to focus activities on older age groups to avoid unnecessary duplication of activities. They were of the opinion that the younger age groups were targeted within the activities of the Reaching Wider Partnerships and as such less focus on under 14's was required at an individual HEI level. (This point is taken forward in section 6, Complimentarity and Alignment)

Competition for students was also noted by many of those interviewed as a factor behind the greater focus on children and young people aged 14-19 years old. Widening access and recruitment are synonymous in many cases (see table 1 for example) and as such the focus of widening access activity is often on individuals who are closest to the recruitment stage.

Based on the above evidence, it is important that the all-age focus of widening access activities should not be overlooked, or allowed to drift, at an individual institution level. Individual institutions should therefore be encouraged to be mindful of demographic trends showing a downturn in school-age children¹¹ and the need to ensure that widening access activities target all age groups in the future as a means of ensuring a highly skilled workforce

¹¹ United Kingdom Government Actuary's Department <http://www.gad.gov.uk/>

across the age spectrum. This is an area that should also be addressed within the context of the Reaching Wider Partnerships.

Recommendation

Both Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual institutions should take steps to address the all-age remit of the Reaching Higher widening access targets and ensure that adult learners, including those already in employment, are targeted more pro-actively through widening access-funded activities.

Lead: Reaching Wider Partnerships, HEIs and HEFCW

DATA SOURCES USED TO INFORM WIDENING ACCESS STRATEGIES

In relation to the data sources and institutional analysis that have informed widening access strategy development, most institutions cited the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation as a key dataset, particularly in relation to activities targeting Communities First areas. The majority of survey respondents also noted that widening access work has been informed by the analysis of their own student cohorts (See table 7 below). However, the degree to which such analysis offers a robust basis for the development of widening access strategies is questionable given that those consulted were of the opinion that the degree of monitoring and tracking of student cohorts that currently takes place is relatively low.

Table 7: Local and regional data sources and analysis used to inform Widening Access Strategies and priorities

Are Widening Access Strategy and priorities based on any of the following local and regional data sources or analyses	Yes		No		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE	All	HE
Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation	15	10	4	2	0	0
UK-wide Higher Education Performance indicators published by Higher education funding bodies	10	9	9	3	0	0
HEFCW publications on participation rates	10	8	5	3	4	1
Own analyses of the profiles of their own student population	16	10	1	1	2	1
Student tracking records according to educational, social, economic and ethnic background	13	8	3	2	3	2
Key Welsh Assembly strategies/priorities	15	10	1	1	3	1

Source: evaluation survey

Institutions use a blend of internal monitoring and external evaluation process to inform future strategy development. While the findings of independent evaluations, where they take place, offer a good cross-sectional overview of activities, it was noted by a number of those consulted that longitudinal studies are also required to monitor the progress of students and

those targeted at pre-entry level over a period of time. Longitudinal studies would increase the level of knowledge relating to the impact achieved by widening access activities and further inform the future strategic direction of widening access activities of individual HEIs. In order to achieve this however, it is necessary to track individuals over time in order to capture learners' distance travelled and final destinations.

Institutions were also asked to outline which policy areas or reference indicators they used to define or identify the widening access cohorts which they target. The evidence collected demonstrates that HEIs cross-reference a range of published data and criteria when prioritising widening access provision to target groups including social class definitions, schools with historic levels of low participation and various other indicators such as levels of free school meals.

Although most HEIs referred to UK performance indicators, published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) when developing their widening access strategies, some placed greater priority on the Reaching Higher targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government. This last claim is interesting as most HEIs (unlike Reaching Wider Partnerships) have been focussing on widening access activities for a number of years. The fact that many of these activities are not currently supported by recorded evidence of the degree to which they have achieved their primary objective of increasing the number of individuals from low participation neighbourhoods to enter higher education suggests two main conclusions:

1. Processes and systems have not been in place to record these outcomes
2. Widening access activities within some HEIs are increasingly being focussed upon the 4 reaching higher widening access target groups and as such institutions are at an early stage of assessing the impact that activities are having on these groups.

Management Information Systems

Management Information Systems (MIS) are used within institutions to record data, including that related to current and past students enrolled onto courses. The MIS data is usually used to inform routine management operations within the institution but the information held can also provide student profiles that inform other areas of operation and activity including widening access activities. Most institutions claim that they are now develop detailed profiles of all students' in order to address their academic and support needs and meet HEFCW reporting requirements.

The use of tracking systems has not been widespread across institutions. Although at least half of the HEIs reported that they had used MIS data to track successful elements of widening access strategies over recent years, the extent to which such systems can successfully track individuals is often limited. Furthermore, despite requests, little tracking data was actually made available during the course of this evaluation, perhaps further questioning the degree to which tracking processes are currently used.

Those who reported that they had not used MIS data to date claimed that they had plans to do so in order to track the progress of individuals from initial widening access activities through to enrolment, progression through the course and on to graduation. Such systems, however, are, generally, still at the early stages of development and are not widespread or

consistent across the sector. Issues relating to data protection also remain unclear in many cases, further hampering progress in this area.

However, monitoring systems are essential tools in terms of assessing the impact of widening access activities and, as such, greater use should be encouraged.

Recommendation

Systematic monitoring and tracking of beneficiaries should be an integral part of institutions' widening access strategies. Monitoring and tracking can assist individual institutions in informing the development of future activities, by helping to identify those activities that have had a positive impact on participation among under-represented groups.

Lead: HEIs.

Recommendation

HEFCW should work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government in keeping informed of current developments under the *Managing Information Across Partners* (MIAP) programme which is being led by DfES and partners. The outcomes of this programme should inform HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government in developing the most appropriate approach to ensure consistency and alignment of different sources of information in Wales. This could identify how to overcome any current barriers to understanding the progression routes of statutory school-age pupils through post-16 education and training and onto higher education.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government jointly with HEFCW

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The process of, and responsibility for, developing institutional widening access strategies varies between institutions. In most instances the responsibility for drafting widening access strategy documents lies with an individual located within one of the institution's schools or departments. Having drafted the strategy the individual will then circulate the document to senior management, including heads of institutions, to review, comment and ensure institutional approval before submission to HEFCW.

Other institutions have adopted a more collective approach with contributions to drafting the strategy document coming from across departments and faculties within the institution. In some instances strategy documents are developed from the input of steering groups, such as the Learning Development Group in one institution and the Widening Access Strategy Steering Group in another. These steering groups have formed specifically to address the widening access agenda of their institution. This second approach ensures input and 'buy-in' from across the institution and alignment with other institutional strategies and priorities, as well as approval at Senior Management level.

Table 8: Responses to statements relating to links between institutions and local communities and the involvement of target groups in widening access strategy design (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree)

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Widening access activities have strengthened links between institutions and local communities.	0	0	0	0	3	3	8	5	7	4	1	0
Target groups have been involved in the design and development of activities.	1	0	3	2	3	3	7	5	4	2	1	0

Source: Evaluation survey

Most survey respondents, including HE respondents, claimed that representatives from widening access target groups have been involved in the design and development of widening access activities (see table 8 above). However, these claims have not been supported to the same extent by evidence collected during consultations. Consultation findings suggest that the inclusion of widening access target groups in the development of widening access strategies is not widespread across the HE sector as a whole. It was also noted that the views of learners and potential learners are often excluded in the planning and development of widening access provision. Some respondents indicated that time constraints during the development of new widening access strategies preclude wide ranging consultation.

Examples were cited, however, of ways in which links with the local community have influenced the direction and nature of widening access activities. One HEI organised focus groups with local community stakeholders to ascertain their views on how to develop widening access activities. Examples were also offered of HEIs working in partnership with community organisations as a means of promoting the links between learning and recreational activities. The case study included below includes one such example. However, examples and case studies such as these are less common across the HE sector in Wales than they should be.

Case Study

The Children’s University and Youth University Programme, NEWI

The concept of a Children’s University involves giving young people credit for a range of activities, such ‘credits’ accumulating into a set of sequential awards. It provides a broad framework within which each student can reach their maximum potential in whatever area of learning they desire, developing skills, interests and abilities that are nurtured for the future.

There are 3 components to the Programme:

- Kids’ College (age 5 – 8, school years 1 – 3)
- Children’s University (age 9 – 13, school years 4 – 8)
- Youth University (age 14 – 19, school years 9 - 14)

On completion of different activities, participants are credited for their efforts. These credits will be ‘banked’ and recorded. Credits will accumulate as students opt for other activities and progress towards a Children’s University recognised award. In addition, Children’s University credits will be transferable from one school to the next if students move. All activities

associated with the Children's University will be validated before approval is given for it to feature in the overall programme. This will ensure that the status and validity of the award process are maintained. All schools in the local area, along with other organisations and community groups, are invited to submit modules for registration with the Children's University.

This project had enrolled over 5,000 school students between the ages of 5 and 19 by November 2006, with 54 schools registered on the programme. NEWI's Children's and Youth University programmes had recognised 1,350 modules totalling 194,643 credits/hours. In addition, almost 40 external organisations provide Children's and Youth University modules including the Country Parks, youth centres, youth theatres, music groups, sports groups and Techniquist.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

As part of the survey carried out, institutions were asked to note whether their widening access strategies and subsequent activities involved all departments across the institution or whether activities were focussed primarily within, or targeted towards, specific departments / faculties or even subject areas within the institution. The results are outlined in the table below.

Table 9: Focus of widening access activities within institutions

	All	HE
Institution-wide	12	6
Within specific departments	6	4
Within specific subjects	1	1
Combination of all the above	2	1
No response	2	0

Source: evaluation survey

Most institutions reported that the focus of their widening access strategy and activities were targeted equally across all departments and faculties across the institution, with many also reporting that all departments were responsible for delivering and monitoring their own widening access activities (see table 9 above). The methods adopted in developing and implementing widening access strategies can be summarised in two broad models.

The first model of strategy implementation is based on a *central control model* whereby responsibility for the direction and focus of all widening access activity rests with one school or department within the institution. The second model is a devolved approach whereby individual departments and faculties are responsible for the direction and focus of their own widening access activities, supported by a central coordination team or steering group.

It was considered that one of the main advantages of the first was that it ensured a coherent and consistent approach, aligned with overall institutional plans. It was also stated that centrally coordinating activities has, to date, enabled institutions to adopt an overview of widening access activity as a whole rather than pockets of activity taking place without any strategic view. Smaller institutions, in particular, agreed that centralised coordination facilitates the prioritisation of strategic objectives, targeted outcomes and maximises the

impact from limited resources. It was also considered that a centralised planning approach ensured against 'mission drift'.

The main advantage of the second model was considered to be the degree to which individual members of staff and heads of department take 'ownership' of widening access responsibilities.

The models and approaches adopted for strategy development and implementation are closely correlated. HEIs that adopt a more collective approach, e.g. those forming widening access steering groups as noted earlier, are inclined to adopt the devolved implementation model while those who do not tend to adopt a more centralised approach.

It would not appear, however, that one approach is necessarily preferable to another in all circumstances. For example, a centralised implementation approach can work equally well within institutions that have a strong commitment to widening access across all departments as it does within those that do not. However, a devolved implementation approach does offer the opportunity to encourage greater ownership and buy-in across institutional departments in situations where increased staff commitment to widening access is required.

In conclusion, we consider there to be potential benefits in disseminating information relating to the various approaches adopted across the sector to developing widening access strategies and allocating relevant funding. This would enable institutions to learn from effective practice employed elsewhere. The Widening Access Committee (a sub-committee of HEFCW) could play a key role in facilitating or assisting this dissemination process.

Recommendation

Individual institutions have developed a number of widening access strategy development and funding allocation models. The Widening Access Committee (WAC) should consider, and make recommendations to HEFCW, on how best to disseminate information relating to the merits of each of these models to enable institutions to adopt the one that is most suitable and favourable to them. The WAC should also consider ways of optimising the degree of funding accountability demonstrated by HEIs for their widening access activities.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee*

* NOTE: the Widening Access Committee is not an executive body. It can consider and recommend courses of action to HEFCW.

HEFCW SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

The majority of institutions considered HEFCW's management of the widening access fund to be very good. Institutions appreciated the relatively 'light touch' approach and considered the levels of reporting required to be acceptable. A couple of institutions, particularly those that were still developing their approach to widening access, noted that they would have preferred to receive greater feedback on strategy documents and progress reports submitted. However, most institutions welcomed the recent round of visits conducted by HEFCW officers which clarified a number of issues relating to the development of Widening Access Strategies 2006/09.

3.2 Student support and retention

The overwhelming majority of institutions confirmed that they had a student support and retention strategy, or that they were in the process of developing one (See table 10 below).

Table 10: Student support and retention strategies

	Yes		No		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE	All	HE
Has your institution developed student support and retention strategies?	15	10	2	2	2	0

Source: Evaluation survey

Most institutions reported that, in working towards their widening access strategy objectives, they offered a range of blended student support services including an institution-wide student support officer, a network of student support staff, drop-in centres and support sessions, either on a one-to-one or group basis. Other provision cited within the survey responses included disability and dyslexia support units, faculty based advice-shops, and on-line web and e-mail based support services. (It is important to note that the student support facilities are available to all students, not only widening access students.)

Table 11: Areas of support offered (all institutions)

	Tick if Yes	Study skills	IT skills	Literacy / numeracy	Statistical skills	Assertiveness	Self esteem / confidence	Financial support
A central student support officer	13	6	6	5	3	3	4	9
A network of student support staff	12	10	8	8	7	3	4	7
A drop in centre	15	10	9	9	5	2	2	5
One-to-one sessions with students	15	10	7	9	5	6	6	7
Workshops / group sessions	14	7	8	7	3	5	4	3

Source: Evaluation survey

Table 12: Areas of support offered (HE institutions only)

	Tick if Yes	Study skills	IT skills	Literacy / numeracy	Statistical skills	Assertiveness	Self esteem / confidence	Financial support
A central student support officer	8	4	4	3	2	2	2	6
A network of student support staff	7	7	5	5	5	1	1	4
A drop in centre	10	7	6	6	3	1	1	3
One-to-one sessions with students	10	7	5	6	3	3	3	5
Workshops / group sessions	9	5	6	5	3	4	3	3

Source: Evaluation survey

Many students from the widening access target groups are likely to have greater need to support themselves economically - for example 80% of students at one institution have part-time jobs during term time, compared with 58 per cent on average across the UK as a whole, according to research published by the NUS in 2005¹². The support offered by central student support staff, therefore, focuses mainly on financial and academic guidance.

Study skills, advice including information and communications technology, academic writing and advanced numeracy skills have also been offered across a whole range of support service areas with particular focus being placed on personal development skills such as assertiveness and confidence building. For example in one university student needs are supported by an education guidance team remitted to deliver study and life skills backed up by system known as 'SOS' - a dedicated IT computer-based support network.

Case Study

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) - Bursaries aimed at increasing retention rates

In 2005/06 the RWCMD provided bursaries for young people with outstanding musical ability who aspire to become professional musicians. The bursaries were aimed at talented students from low income families with the specific intention that they would aid their retention. These bursaries will be continued in future years.

Many of the student support activities highlighted above are funded through widening access premium allocations, although the provision is available to all students. In almost all cases, however, it was reported that the majority of students who access these student support services are from low participation backgrounds and, as such, would fall within the focus of the institution's Widening Access Strategy and activities. At present this is only supported by anecdotal evidence since institutions do not record the details of individuals accessing the services due to issues of confidentiality. However, examples were provided during the course

¹² Higher Education Student Finance, National Union of Students (July 2005)
<http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/Press%20Pack%202005.pdf>

of this evaluation of efforts to ensure that students from low participation backgrounds are fully aware of the support services available.

Case Study
University of Wales Aberystwyth – Signposting project
 University of Wales Aberystwyth has used Widening Access Premium Funding to support initiatives such as ‘Signpost’ and it is linked in with general student support services. ‘Signpost’ is aimed at potentially vulnerable undergraduate students and provision includes peer-based mentoring schemes. Signpost is also actively promoted to Reaching Wider Summer University students to highlight the support available when they become undergraduates.

Table 13: Availability of support services to part-time and franchise/outreach students as well as full-time on-campus students

	Yes		No		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE	All	HE
Are core support services* available to part-time and franchise/outreach students as well as full-time on-campus students?	14	9	0	0	5	3

Source: Evaluation survey

* Respondents were asked to reply in relation to the following support services: central student support officer, a network of student support staff, a drop-in centre, one-to-one sessions, workshops / group sessions

Most institutions also indicated that these support services are available to both full- and part-time students and, additionally, to franchise or outreach students. However, although examples of outreach and online services (such as SOS mentioned above) were highlighted during the evaluation process, such provision was not widely available across all institutions and in many cases individual student support services could only be accessed on campus and during term-time.

This is a potential issue of concern as those consulted at HEIs were of the opinion that student drop out rates increase during periods when students are away from campus, e.g. during semester breaks. It would follow, therefore, that greater attention should be given to off-campus student support.

Monitoring retention rates is also an important aspect of measuring the success of support activities. Some examples of good practice were recorded during the course of this evaluation where retention rates across institutional departments were recorded according to widening access cohorts. One university is particularly focused on drilling down existing data sets to support its retention strategy by, for example, analysing retention by widening access cohorts. However, institutions generally reported that they monitored retention for all students across the institution and overall, with little evidence of wide spread practices whereby the retention rates within individual groups are monitored.

Recommendation

HEIs should be encouraged to conduct their own detailed monitoring into the causes of non-completion within their institution as a means of informing future innovative approaches to student support. Findings from current audits carried out by individual institutions should be encouraged and shared across the sector, possibly through the newly established Widening Access Committee.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

In terms of areas of student support aimed at improving retention rates it is unlikely that the HE sector can adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to retention. From the evidence presented by HEIs during the course of this evaluation it would appear that successful interventions have been informed by institutional analysis of its own student data on non-completion and research into the primary causes of non-completion. As such it would appear that such systematic data analysis should be a foundation stone in the development of any student retention strategy and implementation plan.

3.3 Funding Efficiency and Value for Money

Use of Funding

The *Widening Access to Higher Education Strategies 2002 Circular W02/40HE* issued to HEIs offers guidelines relating to what activities Widening Access Strategy and Premium funding allocations should support. Although the circular stresses that ‘no hard and fast line’ should be drawn between the two funding streams it does suggest that Widening Access Premium funding should be used to recognise the extra costs which are incurred in recruiting and retaining students from low participation backgrounds. Premium funding should also be used to provide appropriate support to these students during their time of study. Examples of such activities include admissions arrangements and recruitment campaigns targeted towards particular low participation groups and communities, as well as appropriate support and counselling services.

The circular suggests that the Widening Access Strategy fund should be used to support pre-entry programmes aimed at attracting individuals from low participation neighbourhoods into higher education. Amongst the areas of activity suggested by HEFCW that this strand of funding should support are the development of non award bearing courses and the enhancement of schemes with young people within schools or the community to encourage them to carry on into higher education. The circular also stresses that within the context of institutions’ own missions and priorities the Council will expect an appropriate balance between “Premium” type activity and “Widening Access Fund” type activities.

Institutions surveyed were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that the distinction between the purpose of the Widening Access Premium and the Widening Access Strategy funding was sufficiently clear across their institution. The responses given are outlined in table 14 below.

Table 14: Distinction between the purpose of the Widening Access Premium and the Widening Access Strategy funding (A score of 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree to some extent; 5 = Strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
The distinction between the purpose of the Widening Access Premium and the Widening Access Strategy funding is sufficiently clear across the whole institution.	1	0	1	0	5	5	4	4	1	1	7	2

Source: evaluation survey

Approximately half of all HEIs who responded to the statement outlined in table 14 were of the opinion that there was sufficient clarity between the purpose of Premium and Strategy funding across their institution. The other half were mainly undecided or non committal. Most institutions considered that Premium funding should be allocated to support staff and infrastructure and Strategy funding allocated to support other activities (pre-and post-enrolment).

One institution noted that it was difficult to clarify what area of funding supported which activity as some activities were supported from a number of different of budget lines. An example was offered of one project that was supported by Access, Premium, Reaching Wider funds as well as some private external funding.

Although it is understandable that some widening access activities, particularly in smaller institutions, may have to be supported by a range of funding sources, this should not necessarily obscure the issue of which funding streams support which activities. As such it is likely that the pooling of funds (noted below), as opposed to the use of multiple funds to support widening access activity, is the main reason for a lack of clarity in the majority of cases.

The evaluation responses, and an analysis of previous widening access strategy documents and progress reports submitted by HEIs to HEFCW, illustrate that a wide range of activities has been supported by the Widening Access Strategy and Premium Funding. Survey responses outline that some institutions spend most of the total widening access funding (Premium and Strategy) on post-entry support systems (including those outlined in section 3.2 above). Generally, from the information submitted through questionnaires, it would appear that these institutions tend to be those whose student profiles already include relatively high proportions of individuals from low participation backgrounds.

However, this is not the case across all institutions and those that have recently developed widening access activities tend to channel the majority of their funds towards pre-enrolment activities. The proportion of funds allocated to pre-entry activities across all HEIs, therefore, ranges from 25% to 80%, according to survey responses. One institution noted that it used Widening Access funds (both Strategy and Premium) almost exclusively to raise awareness and support for widening access across the institution as well as to provide student support

on campus. Other, smaller, institutions reported that most of their pre-enrolment widening access activity had been funded through the Reaching Wider Partnerships.

Premium and Access Strategy funding is usually held by one school, department or unit (usually the same one responsible for developing the widening access strategy as noted earlier) and released to fund widening access activities. In many institutions Premium and Access Strategy funding is strictly ring fenced and is allocated only to support widening access activities. In these circumstances it is relatively easy to monitor and audit the funding allocation and to identify which activities are supported by which fund.

In other institutions however, these funds are pooled centrally within the institution's core funding budget lines and widening access activities, along with a number of other core institutional activities are then supported from this budget line. Some institutions highlighted that this central pooling of widening access funding has allowed them to increase the flexibility of resource allocation to support a variety of actions which relate to widening access and also, more broadly, to human resources, recruitment and marketing and support services.

HEFCW take the view that as long as institutions demonstrate that they undertake the widening access activities they propose within their strategy document, funding allocation processes are decisions to be taken at an individual institutional level. However, centralising funds in this way may create some difficulty in demonstrating efficiency and value for money achieved through widening access funding. There is an apparent trade off between accountability and flexibility depending on whether or not Access Strategy and Premium funds are pooled or ring-fenced

EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Survey respondents were asked whether they considered widening access activities that provide intensive support to smaller targeted groups to be the most effective measures to support widening access. The results gained are outlined in table 15 below.

Table 15: Responses relating to Activities providing intensive support to smaller targeted groups. A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Activities that provide intensive support to smaller targeted groups are the most effective measures to support widening access.	0	0	1	1	5	5	7	7	4	1	5	0

Source: Evaluation survey

Most institutions surveyed were of the opinion that activities that provide intensive support to small targeted groups offer the most effective widening access support. The majority of respondents agreed that, ideally, this is the most effective way of engaging the 'hard to reach' groups and that individuals within certain groups, such as those with disabilities and those leaving care, may require intensive support. One institution commented that 'learners who are

disengaged need intensive support to enable them to gain confidence and develop the skills to get back into learning.' However, all HEIs acknowledged the increased costs of small group working.

Case Study

University of Wales Aberystwyth – Campus Kids holiday scheme

In 2005/06 35 pupils attended the two-week Campus Kids holiday scheme for primary-aged children from Communities First neighbourhoods in the Aberystwyth area. The scheme, which employed undergraduate students as role models, aimed to raise the literacy and numeracy skills and attainment levels of small groups of school pupils as well as building confidence and developing social and communication skills.

Some institutions observed that financial efficiency is affected by factors such as their geographical location which dictates that targeting small groups is the only way to access individuals. Others stressed that efficiency needed to be balanced by the need to respond flexibly to particular challenges. One HEI representative commented that 'No one model works for all HEIs' as approaches to addressing widening access are largely influenced by local circumstances and socio-economic factors: 'activities cannot be assumed to be transferable', he stated. Another institution undertook large and small scale activities and considered that the smaller scale activities were more appropriate for 'targeted groups such as mentoring, community adult education delivery, and study skills support for individual students.'

During the course of the evaluation, criticisms were levelled at some larger scale activities. These criticisms, however, were predominantly based on the fact that some such activities (notably the Aim Higher Roadshow initiated by the Welsh Assembly Government) were not fully designed with a view to complement other widening access activities and were not targeted specifically to meet the needs to under-represented groups. Whilst it is difficult to conclude that large scale activities are, per se, less effective or productive than smaller interventions, it does appear that activities which are most tailored to the specific needs of target groups, and therefore avoid a blanket approach, seem to be held in highest esteem by both practitioners and beneficiaries. It would also appear from the examples reviewed that repeated interactions with the same learners are more effective than 'one-off', large scale interventions.

On the other hand larger scale projects that adopt a broad brush approach aimed at raising awareness can often offer an efficient and effective way of reaching a relatively large number of individuals with limited resources. See the case study below for example. Much could be gained by further sharing experiences and good practice relating to the effectiveness of large and small scale activities and a greater national focus or mechanism for disseminating good practice is therefore required.

Recommendation

Examples of good practice should be identified and disseminated more widely across the sector. The HEFCW coordinated Reaching Wider national conference and the Widening Access Committee should be the main forums for this dissemination.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

Case Study**University of Wales Aberystwyth – getting individuals on to campus**

In 2004/5 the University of Wales Aberystwyth hosted 5 overnight visits for 537 pupils aged 14-17. Pupils participated in a range of workshops including: politics, art, European languages, business, biology, physics, geography, and sports science. The schools targeted were schools with low rates of progression to higher education

Getting individuals from target widening access groups onto university campuses for the first time is often recognised as an important step in encouraging young people from low participation background to consider accessing higher education at a later stage.

3.4 Demonstrating Impact and Added Value

Institutions were asked during consultations and within the survey questions to offer evidence, over and above anecdotal evidence, of the impact generated by their widening access activities. Specifically institutions were asked whether they could present recorded evidence to demonstrate that widening access activities have made a real difference to those being targeted, enabling them to either access or make positive steps towards accessing higher education.

It was suggested during consultations that the impact of pre-entry widening access activities can be measured on three different levels based, on three broad areas at which activities are aimed. The first level is raising confidence and aspirations. This is linked with work undertaken at pre-GCSE school age as well as outreach community and family taster courses.

It is also linked to activities aimed at getting individuals to visit university campuses for the first time. The impact of these activities, and wider impacts such as the influence of family and peer groups, is widely recognised across the UK as being difficult to measure. This is due to any impacts being largely qualitative in nature and that factors influencing confidence and aspirations do not occur in isolation.

The second level of activities is those aimed at raising performance. These include activities such as those aimed at improving GCSE and 'A' level grades. The impact of activities can be measured by the difference in predicted and actual examination grades obtained.

The third level of activity is linked to progression. These activities are aimed at individuals who are close to the point where they can access higher education. These include work with sixth form and FE students as well as adults participating in Foundation Studies courses. The impact of activities at this level are relatively easy to measure as progression from activities

such as summer universities and bridging courses can be monitored and the influence quantified within a relatively short period of time.

Although some evidence demonstrating outcomes and impact has been presented during the course of this evaluation it is clear that some HEIs have further to travel than others before being able to measure robustly the impact of their widening access provision. Relatively little data, beyond anecdotal evidence or records of participation rates relating to individual activities aimed at widening access was presented, and this concurs with similar English-sector research and evaluation findings. Prof Stephen Gorard has recently completed a review of research evidence related to widening access and participation¹³, which considered the impact of interventions intended to widen access to under-represented groups.

‘our conclusion was that, at present, there are few or no interventions in the UK that can be identified as making substantive differences to actual patterns of participation in HE. There are a variety of reasons for this. Perhaps most importantly, a majority of interventions that were reported to us made no attempt to test or demonstrate impact in terms of participation. A few studies looked at patterns of application, but not at the success of these applications, or subsequent participation.’¹⁴

The ability of HEIs to collect evidence to demonstrate the impact of widening access activities is largely reliant on the degree to which effective internal tracking and monitoring systems are in place. Survey responses relating to the degree to which such systems were considered to be in operation were varied in. While many acknowledged that monitoring data and information relating to the volume of activity was collected on a regular basis it was also largely recognised that the long term impact of all widening access activity cannot be confidently assessed because many students follow complex progression pathways.

Table 16: Responses relating to the effectiveness of current review and monitoring systems: A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
There are effective internal review and monitoring systems to assess the impact of widening access activities.	0	0	2	2	2	2	5	5	6	3	4	0

Source: Numbers of respondents to evaluation survey

Examples of evidence based on the short term impacts of activities at this level were offered, often measured through the analysis of post activity evaluations and feedback forms. As detailed in Section 3.1 Management Information Systems (MIS) are being used to provide

¹³ ‘Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education’ (Report to HEFCE by University of York, Higher Education Academy and Institute for Access Studies), July 2006

¹⁴ Taken from Action on Access Bulletin, November 2006 – Issue 36

detailed profiles of the current students in relation to educational, social, economic and ethnic background. As well as informing future widening access strategies this data will also enable comparisons to be made in subsequent years to establish whether widening access and retention activities have increased the number of students enrolling at, and graduating from, institutions, from non-traditional backgrounds.

The tracking of compact pupils will, in one institution, include the monitoring of their progress through each of the three years of the scheme and will capture data on every participant in the scheme in relation to outcomes, e.g. continuation of study post-16, applications to HE or FE, employment or other activity. At another institution an analysis of data regarding mature students on undergraduate programmes will provide a baseline against which widening access activities can be measured.

In all these instances, however, further clarity may be needed as to which data can be stored under the terms of the Data Protection Act. In addition, it has not been possible to measure the longer term impacts of these activities given that tracking systems are only now developing to monitor the number of contacts with individual beneficiaries, and their progress onto higher education.

Given that there is currently no consistent monitoring and impact assessment process across the HE sector in Wales, as is the case with other UK regions, it is not possible to confidently report on the medium- to long-term impact of widening access activities in a consistent manner across the sector. Instead, the evidence base relating to the impact achieved across the sector is limited to a collection of isolated quantitative and qualitative data records as well as a range of anecdotal examples of success.

There was widespread agreement that there is a need to improve monitoring and tracking information currently collected. However, this remains difficult in the absence of a single learner identifier number and the adoption of robust student recording and monitoring systems. A potential breach of data confidentiality is also a major concern when personal data is collected, stored or shared. It is also worth emphasising, however, that these are not Wales specific issues and a similar situation is recorded across the UK.

Recommendation

Institutions may want to ensure that widening access strategies include internal monitoring and evaluation systems which enable them to assess the effects and impacts of their activities. Building on progress to date, effective monitoring activities could capture both quantitative data on progression rates, but also softer outcomes related to attitudes and perceptions and nurturing trust with under-represented communities.

Lead: All HE Institutions

EXAMPLES OF IMPACT

Survey respondents were asked whether or not they considered widening access activities to have significantly increased the number of individuals from low participation neighbourhoods entering higher education. The results outlined a range of differing responses (see table 17

below). Some survey respondents considered that it was too early for the sector to make such claims or, alternatively, if significant contribution to students from low participation neighbourhoods progressing to HEs have been made that they do not yet have data to support this position.

Table 17: Responses relating to the effect of widening access activities and funding
A score of 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree to some extent; 5 = Strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Widening access activities have significantly increased the number of individuals from low participation neighbourhoods entering higher education.	0	0	2	2	7	5	5	4	1	1	4	0

Source: evaluation survey

Progress against the Assembly's Reaching Higher widening access targets was most often cited as evidence of the real impact widening access provision is having on increasing participation. Most institutions referred to their performance against these targets and their increased monitoring of data relating to them. They reported their performance against these targets and their projections within their annual reports to HEFCW and in their new Widening Access Strategies (2006/09).

This data was combined with supporting information relating to successful partnerships with, for example, Communities First neighbourhoods. HEIs also referred to the increases in participation of black and other minority ethnic communities and disabled students, as well as part-time degree students, and they drew attention to data relating to part-time progression towards full-time degree study as well as improved retention rates.

To further improve monitoring and impact assessment institutions are planning a range of activities which are included in their widening access strategies 2006/08. These include evaluation of widening access events; monitoring of non-accredited learning; working with schools and FECs on pupil progression data and the production of statistics that track students from initial engagement activities through to employment are planned.

Examples of impacts achieved on an individual institution level include one institution's compact scheme which encouraged student from low participation backgrounds to consider studying medicine. Although the tracking of the pupils engaged in the scheme is still developing, data obtained over the last three years has revealed a clear correlation between students engaged in the scheme and applying for HE courses and the number of students subsequently accepted onto higher education courses.

Another institution provided evidence that a taster day delivered to a group of 20 people who work in Communities First areas within the region has been further developed into a Certificate of Higher Education programme in Community Support. The College noted that development was a direct response to community needs which were identified by links with the local family centres, who work with families who experience difficulties.

Other case study examples of activities that have generated recognised impacts are noted below.

Case Study

The University of Glamorgan – external evaluations

The external evaluations highlighted the increase in mentoring initiatives and numbers at Education Drop-In Centres as well as evidence of individual progression from non-accredited to accredited provision in community centres. The institution also provided progression statistics for Foundation Studies students who enter degree level study and student administration system data on participation rates for Communities First learners, BME students, disabled students, and Welsh speakers.

Case Study

University of Wales, Swansea – Expanding Horizons

UW Swansea reported that ESF funded courses such as PET and e-learning have successfully tracked learners who have progressed from these taster courses into mainstream FE courses and for whom HE is a potential next step. High demand for courses targeting ethnic minority communities was also highlighted as evidence that targeting specific groups from low participation neighbourhoods is achieving a real impact. The institution has also strengthened community relationships through curriculum development with social enterprises in the region. This has resulted in an increase in part-time degree, community-based students as a result of initial widening access activities via their Open Programme.

PLANNING FOR CHANGE: NEW FEE REGIME

In addition to ensuring that data collection and monitoring systems are in place to measure the effectiveness of current activities, institutions also need to consider what data will be required to monitor the impact of significant changes to funding and fee arrangements. The introduction of variable fees from September 2007 presents both challenges and opportunities to institutions in relation to their widening access activities and measuring impact. It would be premature to attempt to predict the actual impact of a new fee regime on under represented groups, given that initial analysis of the impact of variable fees in England is inconclusive. Opportunities, of course, will arise through the use of the additional fee income to introduce new widening access initiatives and institutions were asked to demonstrate clearly how their fee plans would contribute towards widening access for the Reaching Higher target groups.

The Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW are keen to encourage those institutions with less embedded widening access strategies to improve participation from under represented groups, including RH target groups, by investing proportionally more fee income in bursaries and other widening access measures. The impact of variable fees on institutional widening access strategies will, no doubt, be the subject of future evaluative research.

FUTURE DATA REQUIREMENTS

The tracking of adult learners was identified by several institutions as an example of the need for increased data to measure the impact of widening access activity. Adult learners often

self-select study pathways, moving between providers, and often starting with non-accredited activity, before they progress to longer-term study and a higher education award, but HEIs cannot currently track and support their study and progress to HE,

Survey respondents also reported that additional analysis within their institutions was needed on the causes and catalysts for re-engagement, especially in relation to the impact of positive role models, peer influence, and the marketing of lifelong learning. One institution stated 'they also require new performance measures that provide evidence for the beneficial impact of lifelong learning on other aspects of quality of living – e.g. health, relationships, employment and citizenship activity.' In addition, it was highlighted through the survey that data is also required from the schools and FE systems to allow HEIs to track progress and to plan for their widening access activities.

4 Evaluation of the Reaching Wider initiative

This section summarises the evidence presented in relation to the Reaching Wider initiative. This section draws on information obtained through interviews with Partnership representatives, the evaluation of Aimhigher (the HEFCE programme which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of people from under-represented groups), evidence submitted in questionnaires and desk research to triangulate and validate the evidence base.

4.1 Reaching Wider Development & Progress

Reaching Wider Partnerships are required to develop and deliver collaborative targeted widening access provision to raise the aspirations and educational skills of the four all-age widening access groups identified in *Reaching Higher*. However, the Reaching Higher widening access targets were not published until after the Partnerships had been established and funded and, therefore, the Partnerships' initial funded proposals largely targeted school-age pupils.

Having developed established relationships with schools and other organisations and delivered innovative activities for school children the Partnerships have found it difficult within their existing budgets to extend their work to other target groups and ages. Although Partnerships have been reasonably responsive to these requirements, delivering some family learning and adult learning provision, the Reaching Wider Partnerships currently continue to focus mainly on age fourteen plus students.

Most individuals consulted agreed that Partnerships were formed relatively quickly in response to the Reaching Wider funding that was made available. Some HEIs had little previous experience of working collaboratively together and noted that a 'bedding down' period was required, during which time cooperation and trust was developed. In several cases competitive tensions existed between institutions, which needed to be addressed and overcome, in order to ensure that all partners were committed the collaboration agenda.

Structure of the Partnerships

The four Partnerships operate in different ways:

- The North Wales Partnership has a steering group and three operational groups which report to the steering group. The two HEIs are University of Wales Bangor and the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI).
- The South East Wales Reaching Wider Partnership (First Campus) operates as three hubs; one hub comprises University of Glamorgan, the other University of Wales Newport and the third hub comprises Cardiff University, UWIC and Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Each hub also has representatives from FEIs. Although there are three hubs they all undertake initiatives that cover the whole Partnership region.

- The South West Wales Partnership, until recently, was the smallest Partnership area and included two HEIs, namely Swansea Institute of Higher Education (SIHE) and University of Wales, Swansea.
- The West and Mid Partnership originally included three HEIs, University of Wales Aberystwyth, University of Wales Lampeter and Trinity College Carmarthen. However, Trinity has since reconsidered its position and has moved to the South West Wales Partnership.

Each Partnership has a lead organisation accountable to HEFCW for administrative and financial reporting. In all cases the lead partner coordinates provision and provides the chair of the Partnership steering group. The lead partners are UW Bangor (North Wales), University of Wales Aberystwyth (West and Mid), University of Wales Swansea (South West) and the University of Glamorgan for First Campus (South East – First Campus).

Lead organisations consulted during the course of this evaluation stated that they welcomed the role of lead organisation, but confirmed that they often encountered administration costs that were in excess of administration budget lines funded by Reaching Wider. Many of these costs, mainly additional staff costs, were covered by their own institutional funds; this funding shortfall was identified as an issue of concern by some, but not all lead partners.

Membership varies from region to region within the four Partnerships. All Partnerships include senior representatives from further education and schools and some include community and voluntary organisations, local education authorities and Careers Wales. From evidence submitted, it is clear that HEIs are well placed to drive forward the Partnership's agenda, although other partners clearly play an important role in planning, developing and implementing initiatives. At this stage the Reaching Wider Partnerships reported that they have developed good working relations. This is in spite of some regionally specific ongoing tensions such as current uncertainty relating to the structure of two of the Partnerships see section 2.4 titled 'Reaching Wider and the Effectiveness of Partnerships'

4.2 Reaching Wider Funding, Efficiency and Value for Money

The question of whether Reaching Wider activities offer the most efficient way of addressing the barriers to higher education participation faced by individuals from the four target areas provoked a wide range of responses. The responses outlined in table 18 below suggest that some institutions are unconvinced about the effectiveness of the Reaching Wider activities in addressing barriers to participation. A number of institutions pointed out that the scope of current Reaching Wider activities is limited, compared to individual institutions' activities, and as such that individual institutions will continue to be the drivers in terms of widening access on a sector-wide basis.

There was however also considerable support expressed for the Reaching Wider initiative and its effectiveness in terms of delivering the aims of the Partnerships. One institution highlighted that 'Reaching Wider' offers 'efficient ways of raising aspirations and raising awareness of the opportunities provided by higher education'. The survey and interview responses did also highlight that there was general agreement that continuing collaboration in

terms of the four target groups and delivery through Partnerships should remain, because the structure adds value to provision. As one institution pointed out ‘the Reaching Wider Partnership should not be the primary driver – it should be a catalyst.’

Table 18: Responses relating to the efficiency of Reaching Wider activities in addressing barriers to participation. A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Reaching Wider activities offer the most efficient way of addressing the barriers to participation in higher education faced by individuals from the 4 target areas	0	0	4	3	5	3	7	5	0	0	3	1

Source: evaluation survey

Reaching Wider and Prioritising Target Groups

Although many Partnership members consulted were of the opinion that they did not always agree with the targeted approach adopted for some of the four Reaching Wider groups, there was widespread agreement that focussing attention on a relative narrow set of groups (as opposed to the broader strategic widening access focus adopted by many individual HEIs) was the most appropriate basis upon which to meet the needs of ‘hard to reach’ groups. It was also agreed that the limited resources available under Reaching Wider would, therefore, have a greater impact than would be the case were they to be spread more thinly over a much broader strategic focus.

Table 19: Responses relating to a targeted approach in Reaching Wider against a broader strategic focus: A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
The target-focused initiative (as opposed to a broader strategic focus) is the most appropriate basis upon which to meet the needs of ‘hard to reach’ groups.	0	0	1	1	3	3	6	3	4	4	5	1

Source: evaluation survey

Some evidence presented maintained that national target setting had led to micro-management on the part of HEFCW, although other institutions commented that Partnership activity would be in danger of drift if targets were not set. This was considered especially important when considering the large numbers of different institutions that make up Reaching Wider Partnerships and the requirement for clear targets and strategies while also avoiding duplication of activity.

There were however calls for targeting to be determined locally in order to increase efficiency and ensure that the needs of the institutions' communities are identified and acted upon. It should be acknowledged that Partnerships already have some autonomy to set their own targets relating to the four groups and this flexibility has been welcomed. However a potential future strategy for Reaching Wider could encourage institutions to address the needs of targeted groups that are most relevant to their local area.

Recommendation

In light of calls from Partnerships for greater autonomy to focus on target areas that reflect local needs all Reaching Wider Partnerships should first of all reconfirm their commitment to meeting all Reaching Higher widening access targets. However, Partnerships should also be offered the flexibility to prioritise their targeted activities through discussions with HEFCW. This would enable Partnerships to focus on areas of activity which are most likely to result in greater impacts. The National Coordinator should, therefore, work with Partnerships to identify their specific strengths in relation to the targets, and how these can best serve the needs of their regions.

Lead: Reaching Wider National Co-ordinator and Chairs of Reaching Wider Partnerships

Survey respondents were asked whether they considered defining groups on the basis of Communities First areas to be the most the most appropriate means of securing widening access objectives. The results collected are outlined in table 20 below.

Table 20: Responses relating to defining groups on the basis of Communities First areas
 A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Defining groups on the basis of Communities First areas is the most appropriate means of securing widening access objectives.	3	2	3	1	4	3	2	2	4	3	3	1

Source: evaluation survey

Survey responses indicated a wide divergence of opinions relating to whether or not defining groups on the basis of Communities First areas is the most appropriate means of securing widening access objectives. One institution's comments perhaps summed up these opinions. 'Although not perfect, defining groups on the basis of Communities First allows for targeting of some of our most disadvantaged communities. It is worth noting though that it is not a "one size fits all" approach and there are many people/communities who are disadvantaged yet fall outside of Communities First.'

In addition, there was considerable agreement that selecting one of the widening access targets on the basis of Communities First status offered a clearly identifiable group amongst the most deprived in Wales, as evidenced by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. There

were, however, some calls for the Reaching Wider Initiative to recognise schools which service Communities First wards even though they may physically be located outside of those areas. Some Partnerships are already working with schools that fall into this category, with HEFCW's agreement, and this could be encouraged across all four Partnerships.

Those that disagreed that Communities First areas offered a good means of identifying widening access target groups, argued that Communities First areas are South Wales-centric. Some Partnerships argued that Communities First areas do not always recognise small pockets of exclusion based on other factors such as rurality, geographic isolation and cultural features. These areas, it was argued, often occur in rural areas where there are many small neighbourhoods not in Communities First areas.

There is validity in arguments that deprivation in Wales is not confined to Communities First areas and therefore some benefits may be gained in allowing Partnerships to target some activities towards deprived areas that fall outside Communities First boundaries. Although the widening access activities of individual HEIs may already cover these areas, these activities should be aligned to a greater extent with the activities supported under Reaching Wider particularly if they are targeting different age groups. However, the main focus of addressing the widening access needs of individuals from deprived communities should continue to be within the Communities First areas.

Whilst the importance of the Welsh Medium target was recognised there were a number of responses suggesting that the Welsh medium target is out of step with the widening access agenda. At least half of the institutions consulted, including some institutions located in relatively high Welsh speaking areas, were uncertain as to why Welsh speakers with the potential of undertaking Welsh medium studies were included within the Reaching Higher widening access targets.

It was pointed out that many students studying through the medium of the Welsh are from affluent, high socio-economic groups and that this does not easily sit within the traditional definition of groups under-represented in higher education. Other respondents, however, suggested that a similar argument could also be put forward in relation to specific groups within black and other ethnic minority communities and some disabled students.

HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government, however, are clear on definitions of the Reaching Higher widening access target groups and confirm that all the Reaching Wider target groups are under represented in higher education for a range of reasons. For Welsh medium provision issues include the need for advanced Welsh study skills, the confidence of study in Welsh at higher levels, the awareness of Welsh medium provision, peer pressure and family support. Similar barriers to higher education are shared with other under-represented cohorts. Nevertheless, if some HEIs and Partnerships perceive that one target group is less significant than another; a risk is that there could be a shift away from the agreed targets. .

Reaching Wider and the Effectiveness of Partnerships

Survey respondents were asked whether they considered the regional nature of the Reaching Wider Partnerships to be the most appropriate structure for the Reaching Wider initiative. The results recorded are outlined in table 21 below.

Table 21: Responses relating to the regional structure of Reaching Wider Partnerships
 A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
The regional nature of the Reaching Wider Partnerships is the most appropriate structure for the Reaching Wider initiative.	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	2	8	8	4	1

Source: evaluation survey

Institutions were almost all strongly supportive of the regional nature of the Reaching Wider Partnerships. Many considered themselves to be enthusiastic and active supporters of the regional concept and believed it was the most effective way of meeting the needs of all target communities. This view was supported by positive comments about the Reaching Wider Partnerships utilising the strengths of individual partners within a diverse range of activities.

There were however, some negative aspects of the regional focus of the Reaching Wider Partnerships highlighted during the interview stages. Although the structure of most Partnerships appear to be stable and that the partners involved have overcome any early issues relating to lack of trust, one institution recently decided that it no longer wished to remain within the Partnership it was originally a partner of, and is seeking to form part of another neighbouring Reaching Wider Partnership. The potential move from one Partnership to another has led to a certain amount of tension in one of the Partnerships with concerns that the resulting change in funding allocations following the transfer could lead to a dilution of future activities. The move would potentially fracture the existing regional structure of the Partnerships and as such HEFCW have recommended that the two Partnerships concerned should merge. This suggestion has been resisted to date and as such some uncertainty remains over the composition of the two Partnerships concerned.

Some other concerns were also raised relating to competition and potential duplication of activities between Partnerships close to the regional boundaries, although it should be noted that these concerns were few and far between. The regional focus of the Reaching Wider Partnerships has not been reviewed since their formation, and a review of this nature may be required in the near future.

Recommendation

HEFCW should review the configuration of the Partnerships, including the suitability of the current regional structure of Partnerships, in more depth to identify approaches that offer the most effective contributions to the Reaching Higher widening access targets.

Lead: HEFCW

The effectiveness of the Partnerships is also reflected in the range of activities which they provide. All Partnerships offer a range of activities. Examples include aspiration and awareness raising activities to school pupils under the age of 16 where the contributions of each of the HEIs within the Partnerships have enabled diversity of subject study areas and student experiences to be delivered to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Partnerships have also promoted a high level of buy in from the HEIs, FEIs and other participating groups encouraging commitment to sharing practices engendering a collaborative approach to working and the issues being tackled by all partners.

Moreover, it was pointed out during interviews that the Reaching Wider initiative provides the framework for participation by, and collaboration with a wide variety of educational providers and stakeholders, e.g. HEIs and FEIs, secondary schools, community groups, Careers Wales and the voluntary sector. Indeed, many partners considered that it was this diverse range of members that ensured that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts and provided value for money through the sharing of expertise. One institution commented that the 'Partnership allows us to engage in aspiration raising activities in a cost-effective and collaborative way; if the Partnership was not there we would probably focus more on activities concerned with direct recruitment from key widening access groups.'

The ability of the Partnerships to work collaboratively in addressing widening access issues in the absence of short-term competitive recruitment pressures must be considered as one of their biggest strengths. This enables them to consider the longer term needs of learners', for example skills development, motivation and educational aspiration-raising, and not just the 'quick fix' solutions that will increase short term enrolment levels. Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that Partnerships have sufficient incentives to continue to focus on the longer term needs of their target groups.

HEFCW Support, Guidance

There was a wide range of viewpoints concerning HEFCW's coordination of the Reaching Wider initiative. For some institutions HEFCW's role has been very supportive and effective and enabled them to plan enhanced widening access activities at a regional level as well as develop new partnerships. There were also general levels of satisfaction expressed for HEFCW's coordination of the initiative as a whole by the majority of institutions.

Concerns were raised however, about the narrow focus of the Reaching Wider activities on a limited target group coupled with the fact that Reaching Wider activities are aimed at reaching targets set for the rapidly approaching 2010. Given that HEFCW were of the opinion that progress towards the Reaching Wider targets was relatively slow it has adopted a more 'hands on' management approach. This is in contrast to the relatively light management touch adopted by HEFCW in respect to widening access funding and has prompted claims by some Partnership members that HEFCW excessively micro-manage Partnership activities. Many Partnership members are of the opinion that Partnerships should be given more autonomy to plan and implement their initiatives.

Given the particular focus of the Reaching Wider initiative and the rapidly approaching 2010 target deadline it is understandable that HEFCW adopts a closer management position than usual. However, Partnerships suggested during interviews that they may respond more

favourably to a slightly lighter touch and the greater autonomy may in fact encourage them to set more challenging targets for themselves and also enhance institutional cooperation.

Funding Allocation to Partnerships

The fact that Reaching Wider funding has been, until recently, allocated on an annual basis was highlighted as a key issue facing all Partnerships. This, it was reported, has served to create uncertainty among those employed by the Partnerships. Concerns were also raised as to the degree to which short term funding can lead to risk aversion, particularly in relation to adopting innovative approaches and developing new areas of activity. This aversion stems largely from concerns that developing new or innovative activities that would later have to be stopped due to lack of available funding could prove detrimental to the groups being targeted.

The Minister's remit letter 2002-03 however, outlines her desire that Reaching Wider funding *should* encourage '*innovative*' projects (see section 2.2 for example). Ensuring longer term funding for Partnerships would certainly contribute to the degree to which Partnerships would have the ability and confidence to develop such projects.

It was claimed that the short term nature of Reaching Wider has also increased pressure on staff turnover and created potential skill leakages. Despite some assurances from the Assembly Government and HEFCW that funding will be available to 2010, these have not enabled institutions to offer staff security beyond short term, normally annual contracts and this creates instability and staff tensions. One Partnership in particular reported that it suffered a high turnover of staff as individuals sought more secure employment opportunities elsewhere.

In response HEFCW pointed out it has not been possible to date to provide longer term funding as the funding is only released to them by the National Assembly for Wales on an annual basis. However, from 2006/07 some progress has been made with the allocation of two year funding to 2008/9 with HEFCW and the Assembly working towards rolling funding allocations. The move to a two-year funding cycle is a step forward, but Partnerships still consider that their ability to plan and deliver is restricted.

Recommendation

The Welsh Assembly Government should consider releasing the Reaching Wider initiative funding into HEFCW's mainstream budget to 2010 to enable HEFCW to have greater control over the management of funding. Failing this the Welsh Assembly Government should at least confirm that Reaching Wider initiative funding will be available to 2010.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government

Recommendation

Should funding for the Reaching Wider Partnerships be extended beyond 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW should consider providing longer term funding, possibly allocating funds on a rolling three-year basis.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government

4.3 Demonstrating Impact and Added Value

Measuring Impact of Reaching Wider

Many of the activities supported by the Reaching Wider initiative have been focused around raising awareness, as well as raising skills levels, amongst younger age cohorts and Community groups who are some way off accessing higher education in the immediate future. As such, many of the issues relating to measuring impacts outlined in section 3.4 (including the ability to successfully track and monitor progress being achieved) apply here.

The Reaching Wider Partnerships themselves assess activities through a series of measures both 'hard' and 'soft'. These are used to ensure the Partnerships are adding value as well as avoiding duplication and are overseen through the Partnership committees. Soft measures include awareness raising, capacity building, community links and the development of trust. These are very important areas that are at the core of activities undertaken by the Partnerships. However, it is often difficult to develop recognised indicators that refer to these areas which limits the degree to which the impact of activities relating to them can be measured.

Hard measures include progression through the educational systems and costs/numbers of students. It inevitably takes time to collect effective data for these and one institution commented that it is sometimes difficult to measure impact as some of the students might have come through the system anyway.

However, progress and outputs achieved by Partnerships have been recorded in external evaluations which outline the activities undertaken and assess the quality of the provision. These have been undertaken by all of the Partnerships and, in some cases internal evaluation or moderation has also considered monitoring of students and their progression. A list of evaluation reports produced by the Partnerships is listed in the annexes.

It was suggested by a number of institutions that there needs to be more of a focus of potential collaborative work and dissemination of results. This could be undertaken through the creation of collaborative groups based upon different institutions expertise of dealing with Welsh Assembly Government target groups and the facilities and courses they provide. The All-Wales Activities Development funding, allocated to the Partnerships from Reaching Wider initiative funding, could provide a focus for the development of such groups and these could potentially play a future lead role in the Reaching Wider Partnerships.

Examples of Impact

Survey respondents were asked whether they considered Reaching Wider Partnerships successfully raise awareness of opportunities to widen access across the sector as a whole. The results of the responses offered are summarised in table 22 below.

Table 22: Responses relating to the success of Reaching Wider Partnerships in raising awareness - a score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Reaching Wider Partnerships successfully raise awareness of opportunities to widen access across the sector as a whole.	0	0	1	1	4	3	6	4	5	3	3	1

Source: evaluation survey

Most institutions agreed with the suggestion that Reaching Wider Partnerships successfully raise awareness of opportunities to widen access across the sector as a whole. Several institutions commented in the questionnaire that more further education students are now aware of possible progression routes to higher education than before the Reaching Wider Partnerships were developed.

Reaching wider activities have also successfully offered potential students from low participation backgrounds a taste of university life through open days and summer universities. This has in many cases taken the fear of university away from potential students and given them the confidence to make the choice of accessing higher education. One former summer university student commented that *"I gained a lot more confidence and social skills. It made me realise that university life wasn't as scary as I initially expected."*

There was also evidence of increased information sharing across the Partnerships and sharing of widening access good practice such as the presentation of papers at Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) Cymru and the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) conferences in Wales.

One institution commented that their Reaching Wider Partnership is working effectively because of the high level of 'buy in' from the HEIs, FEIs and other participating groups. The institution noted that *'there is a real team working commitment and certainly the Reaching Wider Partnership has a key role to play in sharing practices and supporting and engendering a collaborative approach to working and the issues being tackled.'*

Case Study

First Campus – Mentoring Modules

The First Campus Partnership is designing and validating mentoring modules embedding study skills mini-modules within their Blackboard virtual learning environment. In addition, some individual institutions within this Partnership have already mainstreamed student

mentoring activity, which is also a mainstreaming feature of two other Partnerships. By developing this good practice, it is envisaged that these institutions will continue to do more of this work as core activity. Some work has already been developed to ensure that First Campus activities are sustained in the future. For example, consultation is underway to embedding student mentoring within the HEI funded through accredited modules.

Reaching Wider and Added Value

Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the suggestion that Reaching Wider activities have provided added value. The results obtained are summarised in table 23 below

Table 23: Responses relating to the added value of Reaching Wider activities - A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Reaching Wider activities have provided added value in terms of delivering Welsh Assembly Government targets.	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	4	6	5	7	1

Source: evaluation survey

There was strong institutional support for the suggestion that Reaching Wider activities have provided added value in terms of making progress towards the Reaching Higher widening access targets. Many institutions noted that the additional funding provided through Reaching Wider has enabled a range of new activities aimed at the target groups to be developed rather than merely increasing the number or scale of activities already in place.

One institution commented that a lot of the aspiration raising activities, with younger-aged cohorts simply 'would not happen without Reaching Wider.' It was also widely considered that the focus on four target groups enabled Partnerships to channel resources in a manner that is likely to generate greater impact upon the Reaching Higher targets than would be the case were they to be spread more thinly over a wider, less defined range of beneficiaries.

All Partnerships reported, for example, that widening access strategies were shared amongst partners although it was less clear how these have effectively influenced or informed the direction of Partnership initiatives.

The degree to which Partnerships have avoided unnecessary duplication of activities was also considered to be an example of added value. This, it was claimed, was a result of good communications between partners and joint coordination of activities.

5 Progress towards targets

This section outlines the progress achieved to date in relation to the number of individuals from the four Reaching Higher / Reaching Wider target groups that have enrolled onto higher education courses since 2001. The figures are based on actual enrolment figures up until 2004 / 05 (the most recent data currently available) and include forecast figures until 2010 for students from Communities First areas as well as students undertaking part of their study through the medium of Welsh. It should be noted at the outset that Reaching Wider Partnerships have only been funded since 2003, and as such the numbers of students progressing to HE from these initiatives, within the time period represented by these figures, will be limited.

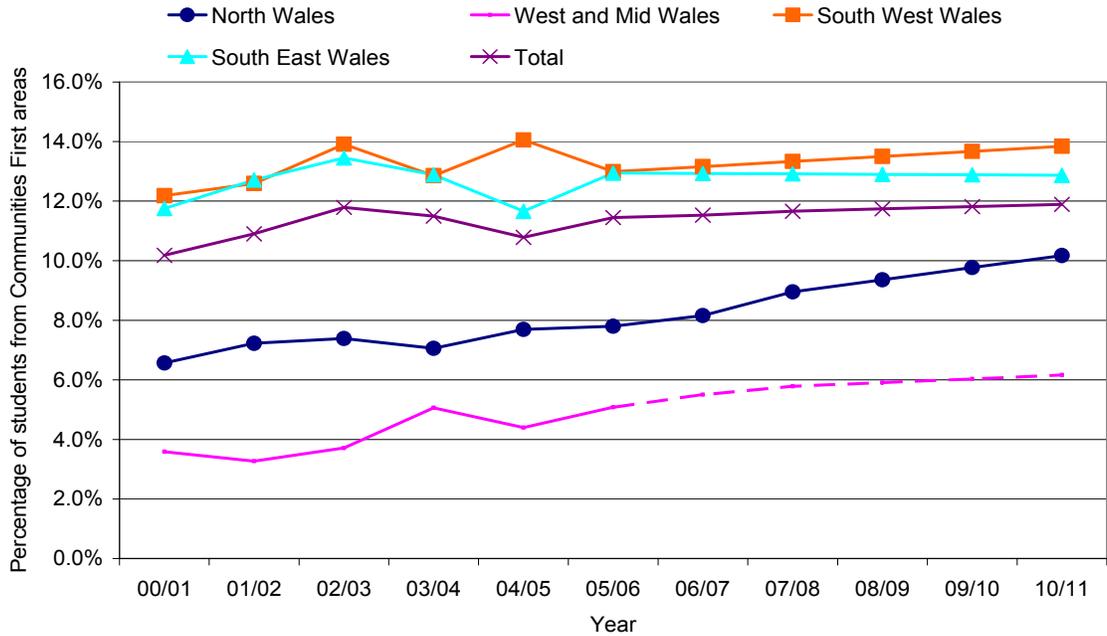
Nevertheless, positive progress has been made in relation to proportional increases in the number of individuals accessing higher education across all four target groups although some of the increases in student numbers from Communities First areas are projected to plateau during the run up until 2010 (possibly due to more accurate data emerging relating to predictions leading to 2010). It should be noted however, that targets set are aimed at the higher education sector as a whole and as such are not the sole responsibility of the Partnerships.

Progress in the Reaching Wider Partnerships

Figure 5.1 below shows changes across HEIs in each of the four Reaching Wider Partnership areas in terms of the percentage of students from Communities First postcodes. Institutions in South East and South West Wales have the highest proportion of students who come from Communities First areas and the trend has been upward (albeit fluctuating somewhat) from 2000 to 2005. It should be noted however, that the South East and South West Partnership regions have high local populations from Communities First areas, whereas the West and Mid and North Wales Partnership regions do not. Research also outlines that Reaching Wider cohorts tend to study at their local institution and, in light of fee increases, are likely to continue to do so. It is therefore expected that these Partnership regions will continue to attract more individuals from Communities First areas into their HEIs.

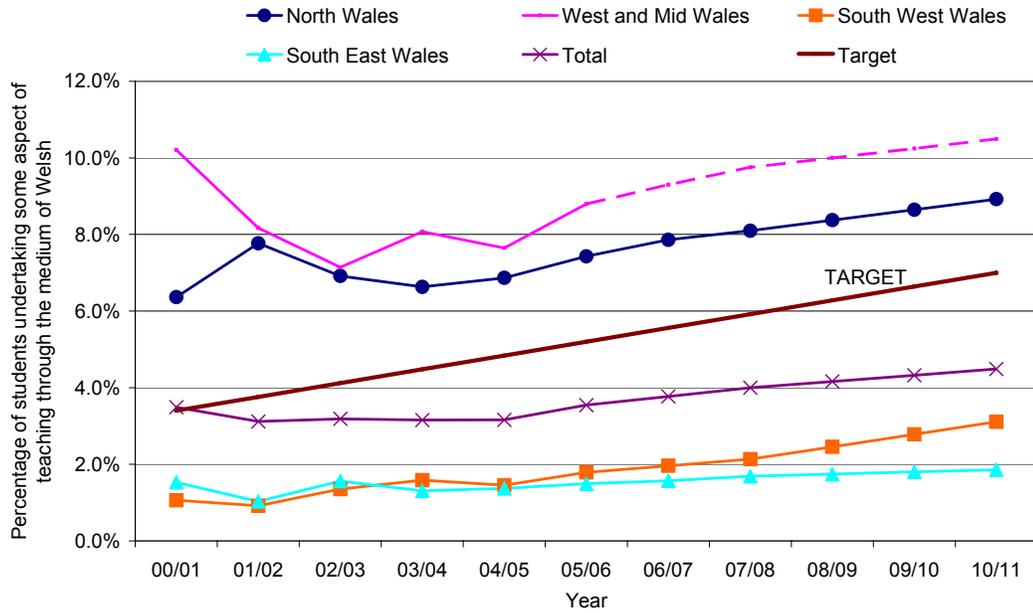
The North and West and Mid Partnership regions currently fall below the national average in terms of students from Communities First areas, but they have recorded increases in recent years. These increases are forecast to continue across North Wales although growth forecasts across the other regional Partnership areas are set to flatten out to some degree between 2007 and 2010.

Figure 5.1 – Higher Education enrolment of Communities First target group – 2001 – 2005 (actual numbers) 2006 – 2001 forecast enrolment



Progress in relation to the percentage of students undertaking some element of their courses through the medium of Welsh has been mixed in different Partnership regions (see figure 5.2 below). The proportion in the West & Mid Wales Partnership region has fallen from over 10% in 2000/1 to less than 9% in 2004/5 although projections show an increase to over 10% again by the year 2011. The north Wales Partnership region has fluctuated but has shown a general upward trend and the proportion of students undertaking at least part of their course through the medium of Welsh is projected to increase to almost 9% by 2011. The south West and south East Partnership regions remain below the national proportional average and target although the percentage of those undertaking some element of their course through the medium of Welsh in the South West Wales Partnership area is predicted to grow continuously between 2006 and 2010 which is very encouraging.

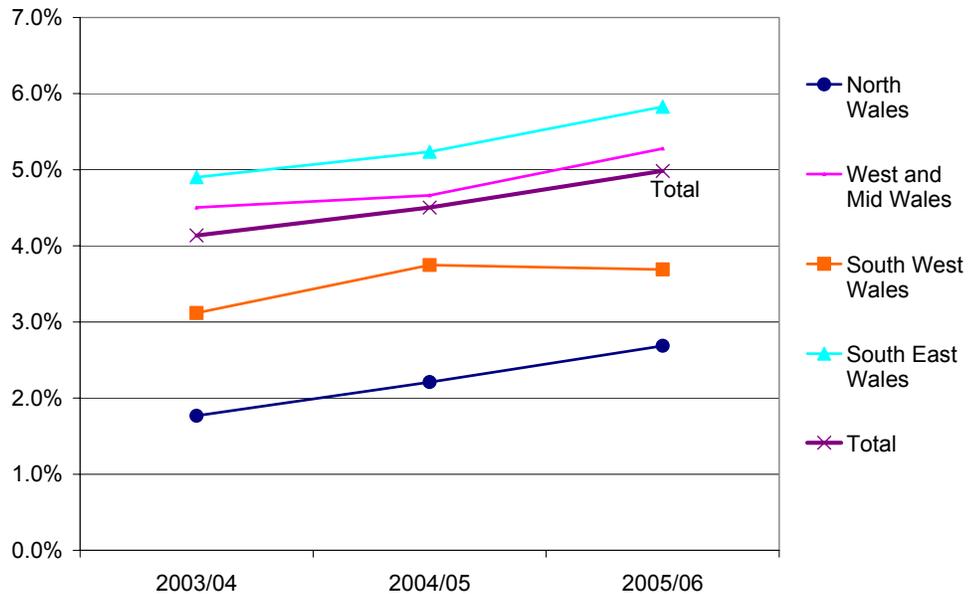
Figure 5.2. Changes in the percentage of students in each Partnership region undertaking some element of their course through the medium of Welsh against the national target 2001 – 2005 (actual numbers) 2006 – 2001 forecast enrolment



Source: HESA Student record data & Institution projections
 *HEIs only – does not include FEIs as specified in the target for this group

There has been growth in the number of students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds across each of the Partnership regions from 2002 to 2005 (see figure 5.3). The South East Wales Partnership region has the highest percentage and has grown to almost 6%, whilst North Wales still has the lowest percentage having grown from 1.8% to 2.7% between 2002/3 and 2004/5¹⁵.

Figure 5.3 Change in the percentage of students in HEIs in each Partnership from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (data only available for 2002 – 2005)

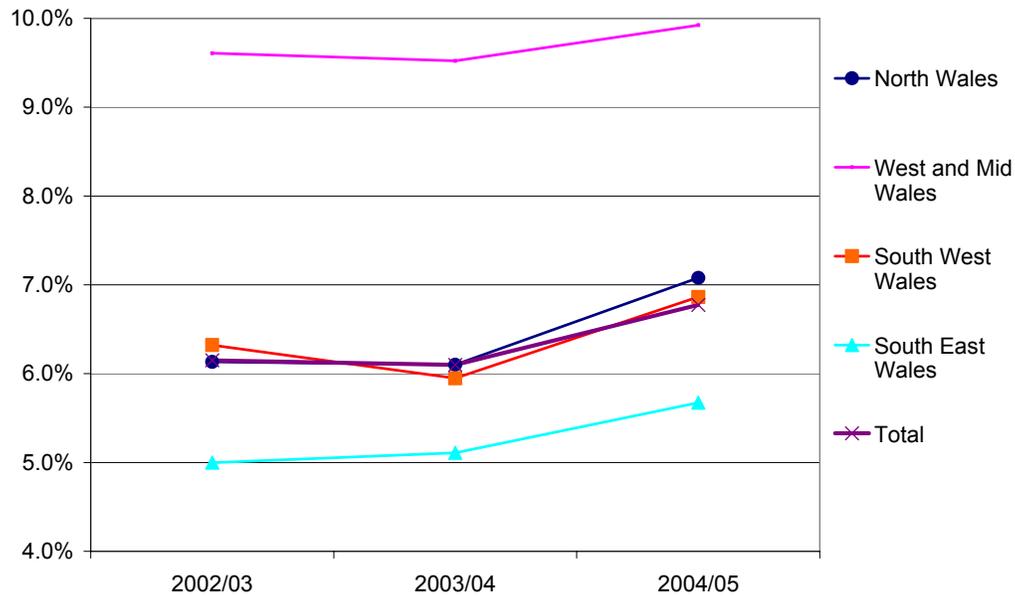


Source: HESA Student record data

¹⁵ It should be noted that while presenting data in a percentage format allows comparisons to be drawn with proportional averages they **do not** reflect the numbers of individuals referred to. In some instances the proportions quoted may refer to a relatively small number of individuals while in other instances the numbers may be higher.

There are large variations in the percentages of disabled students across Reaching Wider Partnership regions as illustrated in figure 5.4. The North Wales Reaching Wider Partnership area recorded the highest percentage with 10% in 2004/5 whilst South East Wales recorded just 6%. However, the trend is upward across all the Partnership regions, although no Reaching Higher targets have been set for this group or black and minority ethnic groups. This also explains why the data sets refer to more recent dates).

Figure 5.4 Change in the percentage of disabled students in HEIs in each Partnership region (data only available for 2002 – 2005)



Source: HESA Student record data

Overall therefore it would appear that proportional increases in higher education enrolment are being recorded across the four target groups. However, if Partnerships are to be motivated to continue to contribute to these positive trends then there is a need to expand the focus of the target period beyond 2010 and support this with longer term funding proposals.

6 Complementarity and alignment

All institutions were of the opinion that their widening access strategies and activities are well-aligned with the Reaching Wider initiative (see table 24 below). Evidence presented relating to the degree to which widening access funded activities complement and align with Reaching Wider funded activities has been put forward in three broad ways:

- **Achieving alignment by reducing duplication**
- **Achieving alignment through a continuum of activity**
- **Achieving alignment by mainstreaming activities**

Table 24: Responses relating to the degree of alignment of Widening Access strategies and the Reaching Wider initiative - A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
Widening Access Strategies and activities of individual institutions are well-aligned with the Reaching Wider initiative.	0	0	0	0	4	3	4	3	6	5	5	1

Source: evaluation survey

Achieving alignment by reducing duplication

Institutions stated in their survey responses that there was little unnecessary duplication of activities due to the coordinating role of the steering groups, strong HEI/FEI and other partner representation, and good relations and communications between the partner institutions. One institution highlighted that enhanced communication and Partnership through Reaching Wider has prevented unnecessary duplication.

Some duplication, however, was felt to be inevitable, and even necessary, in instances where continued and varied intervention is required in the same area. Some Partnership members also highlighted the importance of making sufficient provision available to meet the needs of as many people from the target groups as possible, and in some instances this may involve duplicating efforts.

One institution stated however that some duplication could possibly be perceived to exist within the areas of mentor training, virtual learning environments and summer school activity within their Reaching Wider Partnership. This suggests that the Partnerships may still have some distance to travel in auditing, planning and coordinating regional widening access activities. This issue may also partly be due to the fact that Partnerships have yet to achieve their full potential and could also reflect the degree to which individual institutions wish to protect their own widening access efforts.

Table 25: Responses relating to the degree of unnecessary duplication between widening access activities within institutions and regional Reaching Wider Partnerships. A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
There are a number of areas of unnecessary duplication between widening access activities within institutions and the regional Reaching Wider Partnerships.	5	4	3	2	4	4	2	1	0	0	5	1

Source: evaluation survey

Achieving alignment through a continuum of activity

The most common way Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs have achieved alignment between Reaching Wider and Widening Access is by ensuring that there is sufficient continuum between the activities supported by the two funding sources. This process has been accompanied by a drive for complementarity in terms of individual institutional strategies. This is particularly evident from examples where Reaching Wider initiatives have focused on younger age cohorts, mostly under 16, while widening access activities have supported older age groups, particularly those that are closest to accessing higher education. Similar examples can be found across all four Partnerships, and it is worth noting that these work well for younger age cohorts, but fewer examples of this nature are available for adult groups.

Examples of similar activities aimed at different age groups illustrate the way in which some activities offer a seamless continuum between Reaching Wider initiatives and widening access activities. For example one HEI in North Wales runs an initiative called TOP (Talent Opportunities Programme). The programme is aimed at 14 – 16 year olds but the North Wales Partnership activities dovetail the programme by offering similar support to younger age cohorts who progress seamlessly onto TOP activities at a later stage. (See case study below).

Case Study

University of Wales Bangor - Talent Opportunities Programme (TOP)

TOP aims to raise aspirations and awareness of higher education among young people aged 14-16 from communities with low traditional take-up of higher education. Eight secondary schools across north Wales are currently 'TOP' partners. This means that University staff and students are involved in a range of activities with over 1,200 pupils at those schools.

The scheme has been running since 1998 but since the formation of the North Wales Reaching Wider Partnership, similar activities have also been developed focussing on other age groups. The degree of alignment between the Reaching Wider activities and the widening access supported TOP programme has meant that pupils accessing the programme have continued along a seamless menu of activities and have not been aware of any changes in delivery structure or funding.

Other, smaller HEIs have noted that alignment between Reaching Wider Partnership activities and widening access provision has to date been divided broadly between pre-enrolment activities and post-enrolment activities. In these cases, activities aimed at pre-enrolment awareness raising and confidence building activities have been largely supported by Reaching Wider Partnership funds while post-enrolment activities, such as student support, have been supported by widening access funds.

Achieving alignment by mainstreaming activities

Fewer examples relating to the third form of alignment (i.e. aligning widening access and Reaching Wider activities through mainstreaming) have emerged during the course of this evaluation. One example was offered however, of a bridging programme initially supported by the North Wales Reaching Wider Partnership which has since been mainstreamed with the provision supported by a local further education college partner.

In some cases, the degree of alignment between Reaching Wider activities and widening access activities has become so close that it is difficult to distinguish between them. This is particularly true where individual institutions receive Reaching Wider funds, from a central steering group to enable them to pursue their widening access activities on an institutional level. In these cases it is typical for individual institutions to pool these Reaching Wider funds with their own Widening Access funds to support activities. The distinction between which funding supports which activity then becomes far less clear but does enable greater flexibility in the use of resources especially for smaller institutions (This point is dealt with in more detail in other areas of this report see for example section 3.3).

On the whole, however, most institutions took a neutral line on whether it was always clear which activities should fall under the Reaching Wider umbrella and which should fall under widening access (see table 26 below). Most institutions stressed their own flexibility on this issue and the fact that much depended upon individual Partnerships and the levels of engagement between the respective partners. One further education college commented that this issue 'has been fairly well outlined by the Partnership's director who has always been accessible and has ensured good communication links exist between the college and the lead university.'

Table 26. Responses relating to the degree of clarity between Reaching Wider and Widening Access funded activities - A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	1		2		3		4		5		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE								
It is not always clear which activities should fall under the Reaching Wider initiative and which should fall under widening access.	0	0	4	2	5	5	2	2	1	1	7	2

Source: evaluation survey

7 Young people entering HE from a care background

It was unanimously agreed across all institutions that addressing the barriers to higher education faced by individuals leaving care should be given a high priority. As such those consulted welcomed the strong emphasis placed upon the matter by the Welsh Assembly Government and subsequently by HEFCW. However, there was also widespread acknowledgement that the solution to addressing these barriers was complex and would require wide multi-agency and cross-sector partnership approaches.

In general it is clear that institutions have not, to date, developed many activities that relate directly to the HEI recommendations developed by the Frank Buttle trust in the *Going to University from Care* report¹⁶ (see annexes for full list of recommendations) . However, at least three HEIs reported that they intend to apply for the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for higher education with a further 3 considering applying for the quality mark in the future. (See table 27 below).

Table 27: Activities aimed at widening access to young people from care backgrounds.

Activities	Yes		No		No response	
	All	HE	All	HE	All	HE
Has your institution developed a comprehensive policy relating to young people in or leaving care?	1	0	14	9	4	3
Has your institution developed compact agreements with local authorities to increase participation from care leavers?	2	1	15	10	2	1
Does your institution intend to apply for the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Higher Education?	4	4	10	4	5	4
Do you conduct open days and summer schools specifically to target young people in care?	2	1	14	9	3	2
Do widening access officers attend after care workshops and training events on the care system?	8	7	8	3	3	2
Are young people in care given priority for on-campus accommodation?	2	2	12	7	5	3
Are there any additional areas of support offered to cared for students?	4	3	10	5	5	4

Source: evaluation survey

Recommendation

All higher education institutions in Wales should actively consider adopting the 'Going to University from Care' recommendations outlined by the Frank Buttle Trust.

Lead: All HE institutions

¹⁶ Frank Buttle Trust & Institute for Education, University of London (May 2005) *Going to University from Care*

None of the HEIs have, to date, developed a comprehensive policy relating to young people leaving care. However, a number of institutions noted that the development of such a policy is now being considered and some have noted this as priority area within their 2006/2009 widening access strategy. One HEI reported that it has developed a compact agreement with its local authority to increase participation from care leavers and another is currently working with Social Services, through the Reaching Wider Partnership, to provide widening access activities for school pupils in, or leaving, care.

It was clear from the findings emerging from the Care Leavers in Higher Education Conference, coordinated by HEFCW, on the 22nd of November 2006, that the availability of all-year-round accommodation was one of the main requirements of students entering higher education from a care background. Evidence presented during the conference by young people who had themselves accessed higher education from a care background stressed the nature and impact of the accommodation difficulties they faced during the holiday periods.

It would appear, therefore, that ensuring the availability of all year round accommodation should be one of the main priorities of institutions aiming to increase the support offered to students from care. Furthermore, it was also evident from the experiences shared during the conference that some students from a care background may wish to return to the local authority area where they originated from during holiday periods in order to be near family and friends. As such accommodation during holiday periods should include options to stay within or near their institution of study or to return to the local authority area of their corporate parent.

Two of the institutions consulted and surveyed during the course of this study claimed that they did offer priority on campus accommodation to students leaving care but the availability of continuous all year accommodation is extremely rare (see table 27 above). However, from our consultations it appears that awareness of the accommodation needs of young people entering higher education from a background of care is increasing. However, little evidence is available at the time of writing of solutions being developed to address issues relating to alienation and isolation encountered by students accessing on campus accommodation outside of term or during holiday periods.

Other areas of support required by students entering higher education from a background in care include:

- coordination and access to finance;
- support in understanding higher education processes and procedures;
- access to study mentors

These support requirements are equally applicable to a number of individuals from a range of social and economic backgrounds. As such, although the proportion of the overall student population that come from a care background has, and is likely to continue to, be very small, meeting these needs will not necessarily be a case of allocating a relatively large proportion of resources to a disproportionately small number of students.

Some care leavers may have fractured progression routes and as such may not choose or be in a position to access higher education until they are adults. It is possible that adults from a

care background will also have specific study support needs that may differ to those of young people leaving the care system for the first time. One survey respondent outlined the importance of ensuring that these needs are also understood and that they are not excluded from the focus now placed on younger aged care leavers.

In order for institutions to be in a position to offer any support to students from a care background it is first necessary that they are in a position to identify them. The 2008 UCAS application forms will have an optional tick box for students from a care background to complete and this may increase the level of disclosure, within the understanding that disclosure will enable them to access additional bursaries, study support etc.

Institutions do not currently collect information relating to whether or not individuals come from a care background as standard practice across the sector and many consulted were of the opinion that students from a care background would not wish to disclose this information. However, a recent survey undertaken by the Frank Buttle Trust revealed that 72% of care leavers would tick the UCAS form box if there were clear increases in the support available to them as a consequence. The linkages therefore between clear areas of additional support and self identification are an issue for all HEIs and FEIs providing higher education to consider carefully.

Recommendation

HEIs, and FEIs providing higher education, should raise awareness of and support students with a care background to obtain the range of additional support available and introduce systems that record and monitor information on this student cohort.

Lead: HEIs

Many of the solutions aimed at addressing the needs of students from a care background require multi-agency partnership approaches. Some institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships have already taken some initial steps to create linkages with appropriate organisations and in so doing have encountered some early challenges particularly in relation to engaging with relevant individuals. Two Partnerships, for example, have tried to develop closer links with social services and care representatives in order to raise awareness, on both sides, of the needs and opportunities facing young people from care. However, despite efforts by the Partnerships to organise awareness raising meetings and events attendance to these have generally been quite poor.

The reason for this poor attendance was considered by Partnership representatives to be due to the fact that social services staff need to prioritise time and resources to dealing with immediate issues and as such must place a lower priority on issues relating to future requirements such as higher education. Consulting with representatives from social services was beyond the scope of this study but more research is required in establishing an understanding of how multi-agency partnerships could work effectively to address the higher education needs of individuals from care.

Recommendation

Institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships should work with relevant regional and national care agencies to ensure that optimum support is offered to students from a care background and that this support is consistent both during and outside term-time.

Lead: Institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships

Evidence produced by the young people presenting at the HEFCW Care Leavers in Higher Education Conference demonstrated that their higher education experiences, particularly those relating to dealing with finance issues and accessing pre-enrolment information varied greatly according to the local authority supporting them. In circumstances where the local authority was very supportive the experiences were mainly favourable. HEIs and Reaching Wider Partnerships may, therefore, wish to work with local authorities to ensure that optimum support is offered to students from care before and during their higher education period.

HEIs and Reaching Wider Partnerships should also seek to learn from UK wide good practice. One university is currently doing working in partnership with Winchester University to understand how they developed mentoring and compact agreements aimed at looked after children.

It was noted by one institution representative that looked after children are not homogeneous and as such 'a one size fits all' solution cannot be developed. It is evident from the experiences relayed by young people during the Care Leavers in Higher Education Conference that individuals from care have wide range of needs, many of them not dissimilar to the issues faced by a number of individuals targeted through widening access activities. As such, good practice in supporting this group is likely to be good practice in supporting all under-represented students.

Recommendation

Further research, reviews and dissemination of good practice both nationally and internationally is required in order to gain an understanding of how multi-agency partnerships can be formed to work collaboratively to address the needs of young people entering HE from a care background.

Lead: Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs

Recommendation

Further awareness raising and staff development is also required across all higher and further education institutions and colleges across Wales in order to ensure that staff are aware of the specific needs of people from a background of care and equipped with the knowledge and skills to address them

Lead: HEFCW and individual HEIs

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

WIDENING ACCESS ACTIVITIES

DEVELOPMENT OF WIDENING ACCESS STRATEGIES

The evaluation identified a range of different approaches to the development of Widening Access Strategies, as is to be expected from a diverse sector. There was evidence that, in some instances, HEIs consult with representatives of target groups in order to inform the development of their widening access strategies and with prospective learners and community groups in designing specific widening access activities. We consider this to be a particularly constructive approach and one which has the potential to deliver clear added benefits in terms of HEIs proactively engaging with the communities they serve.

MONITORING AND TRACKING SYSTEMS

A number of institutions are still at relatively early stages of developing data collection and tracking systems that enable them to monitor the outcomes of their widening access activities and track progression of participants and beneficiaries. Clearly, such monitoring systems are essential tools in terms of assessing the impact of widening access activities.

Recommendation 1

Systematic monitoring and tracking of beneficiaries should be an integral part of institutions' widening access strategies. Monitoring and tracking can assist individual institutions in informing the development of future activities, by helping to identify those activities that have had a positive impact on participation among under-represented groups.

Lead: HEIs.

In some instances, it has been reported that issues related to data protection and information sharing have limited recent attempts to establish robust tracking systems for understanding the impact of widening access activities. The use of unique student identifiers to track the impact of widening access activities on learners would address a number of these issues. However, the complexities of information sharing across different partners means that such developments have not been possible to date, as is the case across the other regions of the UK.

We are, however, aware of current work being led by DfES, that is being closely monitored by the Welsh Assembly Government, to investigate the possibilities of developing unique learner

numbers for school pupils, FE and HE students¹⁷. The *Managing Information Across Partners* (MIAP) programme could provide a framework for such an approach in Wales in due course.

Recommendation 2

HEFCW should work closely with HESA and the Welsh Assembly Government in keeping informed of current developments under the *Managing Information Across Partners* (MIAP) programme which is being led by DfES and partners. In the longer term the outcomes of this programme should inform HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government in developing the most appropriate approach to ensure consistency and alignment of different sources of information in Wales. This could identify how to overcome any current barriers to understanding the progression routes of statutory school-age pupils through post-16 education and training and on to higher education.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government jointly with HEFCW and HESA

STUDENT SUPPORT AND RETENTION

Based on the evidence collected during the evaluation, there is an increasing recognition across HEIs that learners from non-traditional backgrounds benefit most from a blended approach to student support. In addition to support through central services on issues relating to finance, health and well being and accommodation, students from Reaching Higher widening access target groups often require greater levels of ongoing study support from tutors.

This issue also raises important questions about the level and type of staff development and resources required to support new learner groups. However, it is encouraging that many HEIs are investing resources to ensure that staff, at a departmental level, have the skills and time to be able to identify additional learner and staff needs. This can provide the impetus for any necessary support on a personal and institutional level.

The reasons for non-completion of HE courses are often complex and support services are sometimes unable to make a difference to learners who have decided not to pursue their studies. In an effort to help improve levels of retention, a number of institutions are carrying out their own analysis into the causes of student non-completion and are tailoring support services accordingly. Although this analysis is generally in its early stages, it offers the opportunity to develop innovative approaches to student support based on individual need, and share good practice, which should be encouraged.

Recommendation 3

HEIs should be encouraged to conduct their own detailed monitoring into the causes of non-completion as a means of informing innovative approaches to student support. Generic

¹⁷ see <http://www.miap.gov.uk/uniquelearnernumbers.htm>

findings from current audits carried out by individual institutions should be shared across the sector, possibly through the newly established Widening Access Committee.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

FUNDING, EFFICIENCY AND VALUE FOR MONEY

As is explained in Section 3.3 of this report, a variety of approaches to distributing widening access funding are utilised across the sector. This, coupled with a general shortage of longitudinal data tracking outcomes, means that it is not currently feasible to take a uniform approach to assessing value for money achieved through widening access funding across the sector. In broad terms, these diverse approaches fall into one of three models for allocating the funding within HEIs.

Model 1

Funding from the various streams (Strategy Funding, Premium Funding, Per Capita Premium for part-time widening access students) is ring-fenced and is administered centrally by one department / unit. A substantial amount of this funding is allocated to specific institution-wide activities, covering school-based recruitment activity, community initiatives and student support. (In most cases, institutions distinguish between activities funded through Premium and Strategy Funding). The balance of widening access funding is distributed to faculties / departments within the institution on the basis that the funding must be used for widening access purposes and departments must demonstrate how the funding has been used. In some instances, individual departments are required to monitor and provide data that demonstrates the impact of these activities.

This model, or variations thereof, represents a broadly transparent system of allocating widening access funding whereby:

- It enables clarity in terms of accountability and identifying the use of funding;
- It encourages cross-departmental buy-in for widening access activities and is contributes towards the mainstreaming of widening access activities.

Model 2

A second model mirrors Model 1, above, but does not provide for specific allocation of funds to individual departments. Once again, overall widening access funding is ring-fenced and administered by one designated department / unit. The funding is then used to support the full range of institutional widening access activities.

Similar to Model 1, this model:

- Provides relative clarity in terms of accountability and should result in all widening access funding being used for a clearly defined purpose.

Model 3

A third model, which characterises the approach taken by some of institutions, involves widening access funding being pooled with other funding. This may involve other HEFCW funding streams, European funding or other funds. Although this central pooled resource is

used to support widening access activities, it is also used to fund non-widening access activities related to staffing, recruitment and marketing.

This model:

- Recognises institutional autonomy and provides for flexibility in terms of planning and delivery of widening activities;
- May present difficulties in identifying how widening access funding is allocated which, in turn, may create problems in terms of demonstrating assessing value for money and impact.

Recommendation 4

Individual institutions have developed a number of widening access strategy development and funding allocation models. The Widening Access Committee (WAC) should consider, and make recommendations to HEFCW, on how best to disseminate information relating to the merits of each of these models to enable institutions to adopt the one that is most suitable and favourable to them. The WAC should also consider ways of optimising the degree of funding accountability demonstrated by HEIs for their widening access activities.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee*

* NOTE: the Widening Access Committee is not an executive body. It can consider and recommend courses of action to HEFCW.

DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

As noted in a recent publication by Action on Access¹⁸, demonstrating evidence of impact is a challenging issue for both practitioners and policymakers engaged with widening access and participation. This evaluation has encountered similar, if not identical, difficulties rehearsed in previous research and studies in this area, namely:

- i) the need for institutions to improve their internal monitoring systems so as to be able to identify both quantifiable and qualitative outcomes;;
- ii) the issue of demonstrating causality - how to evidence the discrete impact achieved by a specific widening access activity, given the various factors that influence decisions to continue onto higher education, particularly when working with young people some years from progressing onto higher education;
- iii) demonstrating impact requires long term tracking and monitoring datasets since, notwithstanding the problems of causality mentioned above, evidence of impact may only become available over substantial periods of time.

As was suggested during the evaluation, 'the impact of summer schools and other such activities may not become evident for many years. Understanding the true nature of that impact requires robust monitoring systems and investment over time.'

¹⁸ E-Bulletin November 2006 – Issue 36, Action on Access - The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation in England

Recommendation 5

Institutions may want to ensure that widening access strategies include internal monitoring and evaluation systems which enable them to assess the effects and impacts of their activities. Building on progress to date, effective monitoring activities could capture both quantitative data on progression rates, but also qualitative outcomes related to attitudes and perceptions and nurturing trust with under-represented communities.

Lead: All HE Institutions

REACHING WIDEREFFECTIVENESS OF PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships' performance in relation to the delivery of the Welsh Assembly Government Reaching Higher widening access targets has been variable and is heavily influenced by the demographic and socio-economic profile of the regions they serve. The evaluation has highlighted the different strengths, challenges and impacts of the Reaching Wider Partnerships in terms of delivering against these targets.

Recommendation 6

In light of calls from Partnerships for greater autonomy to focus on target areas that reflect local needs all Reaching Wider Partnerships should first of all reconfirm their commitment to meeting all Reaching Higher widening access targets. However, Partnerships should also be offered the flexibility to prioritise their targeted activities through discussions with HEFCW. This would enable Partnerships to focus on areas of activity which are most likely to result in greater impacts. The National Coordinator should, therefore, work with Partnerships to identify their specific strengths in relation to the targets, and how these can best serve the needs of their regions.

Lead: Reaching Wider National Co-ordinator and Chairs of Reaching Wider Partnerships

Recommendation 7

HEFCW should review the configuration of the Partnerships, including the suitability of the current regional structure of Partnerships, in more depth to identify approaches that offer the most effective contributions to the Reaching Higher widening access targets.

Lead: HEFCW

FUNDING

Based on evidence received, it is clear that there is a general sense of frustration at the way in which the Reaching Wider Partnerships are funded. Partnership representatives themselves acknowledge that it has proved particularly challenging to develop innovative

approaches in the context of uncertain annual funding. The move to a two-year funding cycle is a step forward, but Partnerships still consider that their ability to plan, build relationships and networks and sustain delivery is restricted. It is, therefore, difficult to take a long-term view regarding Partnerships' widening access strategies at a regional level.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Assembly Government should consider releasing Reaching Wider funding into HEFCW's mainstream budget to 2010 to enable the Funding Council to have greater control over the management and flow of funding. Failing this the Welsh Assembly Government should at least confirm that Reaching Wider funding will be available to 2010.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government

Recommendation 9

Should funding for Reaching Wider Partnerships be extended beyond 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW should consider providing longer term funding, possibly allocating funds on a rolling three-year basis.

Lead: Welsh Assembly Government

CROSS CUTTING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DISSEMINATION ROLE FOR WIDENING ACCESS COMMITTEE

Based on both the desk research undertaken as part of this study and the primary evidence collected, it is clear that a strategically planned programme of widening access activities enabling repeated interactions with the same learners is more effective than 'one-off', large scale interventions. It appears that work remains to be done, however, over the longer term on a sector-wide basis, to identify the most effective interventions – at both institutional and Partnership level. A greater national focus or mechanism for disseminating good practice is therefore required in order to further improve areas of efficiency and quality

Recommendation 10

Examples of good practice should be identified and disseminated more widely across the sector. The HEFCW coordinated Reaching Wider national conference and the Widening Access Committee should be the main forums for this dissemination.

Lead: HEFCW / Widening Access Committee

ALL AGE TARGETS AND PARTICIPATION

As noted in earlier sections of the report Welsh Assembly Government targets for widening access are focused on all-age participation. However activity across the Partnerships is

predominantly targeted at school-age children. In view of demographic trends and the increasing importance of a highly skilled workforce it is necessary ensure that the Partnerships target all age groups in the future.

Recommendation 11

Both Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual institutions should take steps to address the all-age remit of the Reaching Higher widening access targets and ensure that adult learners, including those already in employment, are targeted more pro-actively through a range of widening access activities.

Lead: Reaching Wider Partnerships and HEIs

NEW FEE REGIME

The introduction of variable fees from September 2007 presents both challenges and opportunities to institutions in relation to their widening access activities. It would be inappropriate for this report to attempt to predict the actual impact of a new fee regime on under represented groups, given that initial analysis of the impact of variable fees in England is inconclusive. Opportunities, of course, will arise through the use of the additional fee income to introduce new widening access activities and bursaries, and institutions were asked to demonstrate clearly how their fee plans would contribute towards widening access for the Reaching Higher target groups.

The Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW are keen to encourage those institutions with less embedded widening access strategies to improve participation from under represented groups, including Reaching Higher widening access target groups, by investing proportionally more fee income in bursaries and other widening access measures. The impact of variable fees on institutional widening access strategies will, no doubt, be the subject of future evaluative research.

1. YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING HE FROM A CARE BACKGROUND

The evaluation examined evidence related to the challenges faced by young people entering higher education from a care background. Although this initial evidence provides valuable information, it is clear that further work is required in this area in order help institutions deliver support for people who have been in care and to work towards achieving the recommendations in the Frank Buttle Trust report *Going to University from Care..*

Recommendation 12

All higher education institutions in Wales should actively consider adopting the 'Going to University from Care' recommendations outlined by the Frank Buttle Trust.

Lead: All HE institutions

It is also clear from evidence presented that addressing the needs of this cohort of young people will require a multi-agency approach, involving a range of partners from across local government and education.

Recommendation 13

Further research, reviews and dissemination of good practice nationally and internationally is required in order to gain an understanding of how multi-agency partnerships can be formed to work collaboratively to address the needs of young people entering HE from a care background.

Lead: Reaching Wider Partnerships and individual HEIs

Recommendation 14

Further awareness raising and staff development is also required across all higher and further education institutions and colleges across Wales in order to ensure that staff are aware of the specific needs of people from a background of care and equipped with the knowledge and skills to address them.

Lead: HEFCW & individual HEI/FEI

Recommendation 15

Institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships should work with relevant regional and national care agencies to ensure that optimum support is offered to students and that this support is consistent both during and outside term-time. Furthermore, efforts should be taken to ensure that relevant agencies continue to offer equivalent support to students from a care background..

Lead: HEIs and Reaching Wider Partnerships

Institutions do not currently collect information relating to whether or not individuals come from a care background as standard practice. In addition, many students are unaware of the additional support to which they are entitled.

Recommendation 16

HEIs, and FEIs providing higher education, should raise awareness of and support students with a care background to obtain the range of additional support available and introduce systems that record and monitor information on this cohort of students.

Lead: HEIs

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Evaluation Aims

HEFCW wishes to commission an evaluation of widening access funded activity, and the Reaching Wider initiative, to ensure that future policy development, and the January 2007 report to the Assembly is underpinned by robust objective information.

The aims of this evaluation are to:

- Investigate the development, progress and impact of both the widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.
- Consider whether, and if so what changes should be introduced at national level, at sector-wide and/or through the Partnerships, to ensure that progress can be made towards opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society.

Evaluation Objectives

The tender is for a study that will evaluate widening access funded activity and the Reaching Wider initiative.

The evaluation objective is to evaluate the development, progress and impact of widening access funded activities and the Reaching Wider initiative.

Within this, for widening access funded activities, to consider:

- a) Evidence of institutions' widening access activities increasing participation in higher education, including to young people having been in care;
- b) The extent to which widening access and Reaching Wider activities are aligned, avoid duplication and jointly provide a continuum of learning opportunities for widening access cohorts;
- c) The equality of opportunity provided by widening access activities evidenced by the impact on groups under-represented in higher education. (Welsh speakers and young people having been in care should also be considered);
- d) The good practice and key strengths of widening access activities and also the constraints/weaknesses;
- e) Whether strategic changes are required, at widening access national or regional level to ensure that the sector continues to make progress towards progressively opening higher education opportunities to all parts of society.

And for the Reaching Wider to consider:

- a) Evidence of the Reaching Wider initiative in making progress towards the sector-wide RH widening access targets;
- b) The 'additionality' the Reaching Wider initiative provides to the HE sector, through an assessment of the difference regional collaborative work makes, over and above the impact of other HEI widening access interventions and policies;

- c) The equality of opportunity provided by Reaching Wider activities enhanced by the impact on the Reaching Higher widening access target groups;
- d) The good practice and key strengths of the Reaching Wider initiative and also the constraints/weaknesses;
- e) Whether, and if so what, strategic changes are required at partnership level to ensure that the sector achieves the *Reaching Higher* widening access targets;

ANNEX 2: REFERENCES AND DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Action on Access - The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation, eBulletin Issue 33: Widening Participation Research (July 2006)

Action on Access - The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation, eBulletin Issue 36: Impact and Evidence Widening (November 2006)

Department for Education and Skills Widening Participation in Higher Education (November 2006)

Field, J. The West and Mid Wales Widening Access Partnership Evaluation Report (June 2004)

Frank Buttle Trust & Institute of Education, University of London Going to University from Care (May 2005)

Gorard, S. et al. Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education (Report to HEFCE by University of York, Higher Education Academy and Institute for Access Studies), July 2006

Higher Education Funding Council for England Widening Participation: Report to the Minister of State for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning (November 2006)

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales Race Equality Scheme (May 2005)

JM Consulting The Costs of Widening Access and Participation in Higher Education in Wales (A report to HEFCW), September 2005

Johansson, M et al. 'Bridging the Gap: Comparing actions for widening participation in higher education in Sweden and England 2005' (2005)

Katherine Hughes Associates Limited Within Reach? An interim evaluation of the North Wales Reaching Higher – Reaching Wider Partnership Project (July 2005)

O'Kane, D. Evaluation of Reaching Wider Reaching Higher West Wales Partnership (January 2005)

National Foundation for Educational Research Evaluation of the First Campus Monitoring Programme (September 2004)

National Union of Students Media Resource: Higher Education Student Finance (July 2005)

The Rees Review Fair and Flexible Funding: A Welsh Model to Promote Quality and Access in Higher Education (May 2005),

Welsh Assembly Government Reaching Higher: Higher Education and the Learning Country (March 2002),

Welsh Assembly Government Higher Education Funding Council for Wales Remit Letters 2002-03 to 2006-07 (February 2005)

Welsh Assembly Government The Learning Country: Vision into Action (October 2006)

HEFCW CIRCULARS AND GUIDANCE

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (June 2002), Widening Access to Higher Education Strategies 2002, W02/40HE

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (August 2004), Widening Access Strategies 2004/05 (Including Disability Provision Development Plans), W04/55H

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (November 2004), Reaching Higher "Communities First" Target, W04/74HE

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (February 2006), Widening Access Strategy Implementation Plans / Disability Provision Development Plans 2004/05 and 2005/06; Race Equality Impact Assessments in Widening Access, W06/05HE

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (April 2006), Additional Allocation to Support Widening Access Priorities in 2005/06 and 2006/07, W06/08HE

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (July 2006), Widening Access to Higher Education Strategies 2006/09, W06/27HE

REACHING WIDER GUIDANCE

Guidance for the Submission of Proposals for Year Two Funding (December 2003)

Year Two Funding Allocations (March 2004)

Guidance on Critical Audit and Risk Management (April 2004)

Guidance Notes for the Submission of the July 2004 Progress Report (May 2004)

Reaching Higher Reaching Wider Targets (July 2004)

Reaching Higher Reaching Wider All-Wales Reaching Wider Activity Development Funding (August 2005)

ON-LINE SOURCES

HESA website and datasets: www.hesa.ac.uk

Welsh Assembly Government: www.wales.gov.uk

ANNEX 3: HEFCW REMIT LETTERS

The following sections are extracts from the HEFCW Remit Letters issued by the Minister of Education Lifelong Learning and Skills (2002 – 2006) that refer to widening access.

- **HEFCW REMIT LETTER 2002-03**

‘I look to the Council to keep up the pressure in the drive to increase participation in and widen access to higher education. HEIs must contribute to making a reality our vision of a society where all those with the potential to benefit have access to higher education’.

- **HEFCW REMIT LETTER 2003-04**

‘The sector in Wales has traditionally performed relatively well in widening access. I am keen to see it build on this performance and also improve retention rates. The key to real success lies in ensuring that students from non traditional backgrounds record similar success rates as other student groups. I welcome the formation of the four widening access Partnerships, facilitated by HEFCW’s investment. Subject to the outcome of the supplementary budget, I would wish to see the work of these Partnerships continued and developed further’.

‘I would like you **to undertake a review of the real costs of widening access** and ways of meeting them; I would also ask you to assess the impact and consequences of meeting our targets for widening access¹⁹.

‘I recently launched Aim-Higher Wales. This initiative builds on a similar project in England, and involves a travelling roadshow visiting promising pupils from schools in deprived and low participation neighbourhoods, who may not previously have considered the opportunities offered by higher education. I see this as complementing work carried out by the Council and by individual institutions. It reflects the importance I place on national co-ordination of widening access, not least to ensure that there are no areas of Wales which do not have links with HEIs. It also reflects the importance of long term planning to achieve our widening access targets and the need to raise attainment and aspiration from a younger age. I look to the Council to pick up this theme in its widening access work’.

- **HEFCW REMIT LETTER 2004-05**

‘I am pleased with the continued progress that the Reaching Wider partnerships have made in the last year. The partnerships have consolidated the sound foundations laid at their inception and I expect HEFCW to continue to support them financially and to continue its other support widening access. I would like you to work closely with the partnerships to improve the co-ordination of widening access initiatives across Wales and to ensure a clear

¹⁹ All text in bold reflects highlighted text in the original remit letter documents

alignment between institutional widening access strategies and the partnerships' strategies to bring added value. I expect the partnerships to detail how they plan to communicate, engage and work closely with the voluntary sector, as well as Careers Wales and Aimhigher Wales'.

"During the early months of the 2005-2006 the Assembly Government will need to respond to the recommendations of the review group chaired by Professor Teresa Rees on student finance. Our response will have important implications for the Council's work and I will expect you to continue your close involvement in support of the establishment of Student Finance Wales. I will also look to the Council to keep under review whether, in the light of the Assembly Government's response to the Rees Group, there should be any alterations to those policies aimed at widening access from which you are responsible".

- **HEFCW REMIT LETTER 2005-06**

'I am pleased with the continued progress that the Reaching Wider partnerships have made in the last year. The partnerships have consolidated the sound foundations laid at their inception and I expect HEFCW to continue to support them financially and to continue its other support widening access. I would like you to work closely with the partnerships to improve the co-ordination of widening access initiatives across Wales and to ensure a clear alignment between institutional widening access strategies and the partnerships' strategies to bring added value. I expect the partnerships to detail how they plan to communicate, engage and work closely with the voluntary sector, as well as Careers Wales and Aimhigher Wales'.

- **HEFCW REMIT LETTER 2006-07**

'The introduction of the new fee arrangements coupled with the new statutory student finance package alongside institutional bursaries is likely to have an important bearing on widening participation activities. I would like the Council to take stock during 2006 of whether, and if so what, changes should be introduced at national level and through Reaching Wider Partnerships so as to ensure that we can maintain progress towards progressively opening higher education opportunities to all parts of our society. A report on your conclusions should be submitted by January 2007. I will expect this advice to include whether further specific steps should be taken to reflect the particular circumstances of young people entering HE having been in care'.

ANNEX 4: EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Evaluation of the Widening Access Funded Activity and the Reaching Wider initiative

The following set of questions relate to widening access strategies and activities of individual institutions.

Widening Access

Targets & Progress

- Please outline in the box below what you consider to be the key drivers upon which you have developed your widening access strategies and activities.

- Please indicate the level of priority given to targeting the following groups of individuals within your current widening access policy, strategy and activity. (1 = no priority – 5 = very high priority)

	Low Priority			High Priority		Score
Individuals from Communities First areas	1	2	3	4	5	
Black and minority ethnic individuals	1	2	3	4	5	
People with disabilities	1	2	3	4	5	
Welsh speakers	1	2	3	4	5	
Other please specify	1	2	3	4	5	

- 2.1 Please provide (in the box below) additional comments, or examples, relating to the response you have offered above.

- Please indicate the level of priority given to targeting the following age groups within your current widening access policy, strategy and activity. (1 =no priority – 5 = very high priority).

	Low Priority			High Priority		Score
Under 14 year olds	1	2	3	4	5	
14 to 19 year olds	1	2	3	4	5	
Over 19s and under 25	1	2	3	4	5	
Over 25 year olds	1	2	3	4	5	
Other please specify (e.g. inter- generational age groups)	1	2	3	4	5	

- 3.1 Please provide (in the box below) additional comments relating to the response you have offered above.

--

4. Please indicate (by ticking all the appropriate boxes) whether your Widening Access Strategy and priorities are based on any of the following local and regional data sources or analyses. Please include summarised details where possible.

	Yes	Summary details
Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation		
UK-wide Higher Education Performance indicators published by Higher education funding bodies		
HEFCW publications on participation rates		
Own analyses of the profiles of their own student population		
Student tracking records according to educational, social, economic and ethnic background		
Key Welsh Assembly strategies/priorities (please specify).....		
Other (please specify).....		

5. Please offer in the box below a brief summary of how widening access activities and targets at your institution are determined (i.e. who is involved in planning, decision-making and resourcing of activities?).

--

6. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement(s) by offering a score of 1 to 5 for each. A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree to some extent; 5 = Strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree					Strongly agree					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Widening access activities have strengthened links between institutions and local communities.											
Target groups have been involved in the design and development of activities.											

6.1 Please outline in the box below your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer.

--

7. Please indicate (by ticking the appropriate box) which of the following aspects of institutional planning are directly linked into your Widening Access Strategy. Where possible please include a brief summary of the impact that these links have had to date.

	Yes	Summary of impacts
Learning and teaching		
Staff development		
Research		
Recruitment and admissions		
Library and information services		
Other please specify.....		

8. Are the widening access strategies developed focused at an institutional level or are they focused within specific departments or subjects? (Please tick appropriate box)

All institutional	Within specific departments	Within specific subjects	Other please specify (e.g. a combination of departmental and subject focus)

9. Please outline in the box below what you consider to be the main advantage(s) and/or disadvantage(s) of these approaches. (Please offer examples to support your views).

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10. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by offering a score of 1 to 5.
A score of 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree to some extent; 5 = Strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree		Score
10.1 Widening access activities have become embedded as core elements within institutions' overall strategic plans.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box below your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer.						
10.2 There is a strong commitment to addressing widening access issues across the institution and many						

widening access activities would take place even if HEFCW funding was not available.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box below your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer.						
10.3 There are effective internal review and monitoring systems to assess the impact of widening access activities.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box below your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer.						

Student Support and Retention

11. Has your institution developed student support and retention strategies?

Yes		go to question (12)
No		go to question (14)

12. Please indicate (by ticking the appropriate box(es)) whether your institution offers any of the following areas of support for students targeted within the Widening Access Strategy. (In each case please indicate what area of support is offered.)

	Tick if Yes	Study skills	IT skills	Literacy / numeracy	Statistical skills	Assertiveness	Self esteem / confidence	Financial support	Other / please specify
A central student support officer									
A network of student support staff									
A drop in centre									
One-to-one sessions with students									
Workshops / group sessions									
Other please specify.....									

13. Are the support services listed above available to part-time and franchise/outreach students as well as full-time on-campus students?

Yes		Additional comments
No		

Widening Access to Looked after Children

14. Please tick either 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below relating to activities aimed at widening access to young people from care backgrounds.

	Yes	No	Details/reason
Has your institution developed a comprehensive policy relating to young people in or leaving care?			
Has your institution developed compact agreements with local authorities to increase participation from care leavers?			
Does your institution intend to apply for the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Higher Education?			
Do you conduct open days and summer schools specifically to target young people in care?			
Do widening access officers attend after care workshops and training events on the care system?			
Are young people who are / have been in care given priority for on-campus accommodation?			
Is there any additional support offered to students who have been in care?			

14.1 Please outline in the box below your reasons for allocating the above answers, including examples or other evidence to support your answer.

Funding, Efficiency and Value for Money

15. Please summarise in the box below the main ways you allocate and spend Widening Access Strategy funding.

16. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement by offering a score of 1 to 5.
 A score of 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree to some extent; 5 = Strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree					Strongly agree					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
The distinction between the purpose of the Widening Access Premium and the Widening Access Strategy funding is sufficiently clear across the whole institution.											

17. Please summarise in the box below the main ways you allocate and spend Widening Access Premium funding.

18. Please offer an indication of what proportion of widening access funding (Strategy and Premium) is allocated to pre-entry activities and what proportion is allocated to post-entry support and activities.

Pre entry activities (%)	Post entry activity (%)

19. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by offering a score of 1 to 5.
 A score of 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree to some extent; 5 = Strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree					Strongly agree	Score
19.1 The Widening Access Premium is the most effective mechanism for recognising the pressures on institutions to widening access.	1	2	3	4	5		
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:							

19.2 Activities that provide intensive support to smaller targeted groups are the most effective measures to support widening access.	1	2	3	4	5		
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:							

20. HEFCW has asked individual institutions to outline additional / external funding that has been secured to address widening access activity. Please summarise these details in the box below including amounts of money secured, funding sources and activities supported.

Value of additional / external funding secured (£)	Source of funding	Main activities supported
£		
£		
£		
Total		

21. What proportion of your total widening access funding is made up of these additional funds?

%

Impact and Added Value

22. Please outline below what evidence you have (beyond anecdotal case studies) that widening access activities are having a **real** impact on increasing participation amongst individuals from low participation neighbourhoods. Please feel free to attach to this questionnaire any additional information to support your answer.

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23. Please outline in the box below what evidence, other than anecdotal, you consider would be useful in order to demonstrate impact.

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24. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by offering a score of 1 to 5.
A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree					Strongly agree	Score
24.1 Widening access activities have significantly increased the number of individuals from low participation neighbourhoods entering higher education.	1	2	3	4	5		
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:							

24.2 Without the Widening Access Strategy and Premium funding it would not be possible to address any of the barriers to participation faced by individuals from low participation neighbourhoods.	1	2	3	4	5		
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:							

24.3 The focus of the widening access funded activities constrains or prevents institutions from working with groups with more/different needs.	1	2	3	4	5		
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:							

The following set of questions relate to the Reaching Wider initiative and activities of regional Partnerships.

Reaching Wider

25. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by offering a score of 1 to 5 for each. A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree to some extent; 3 = neither agree or disagree; 4 = agree to some extent; 5 = strongly agree

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree		Score
25.1 Focussing Reaching Wider activities upon the four target groups is the most effective way of ensuring that the initiative addresses areas not addressed elsewhere.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						
25.2 The target-focused initiative (as opposed to a broader strategic focus) is the most appropriate basis upon which to meet the needs of 'hard to reach' groups.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						
25.3 The regional nature of the Reaching Wider Partnerships is the most appropriate structure for the Reaching Wider initiative.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						
25.4 HEFCW's coordination of the Reaching Wider initiative has been effective.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						
25.5 Reaching Wider Partnerships successfully raise awareness of opportunities to widen access across the sector as a whole.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						
25.6 A great deal of information and good practice is shared amongst members	1	2	3	4	5	

of the Partnerships from different institutions, organisations and Partnerships.						
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.7 Widening Access Strategies and activities of individual institutions are well-aligned with the Reaching Wider initiative.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.8 There are a number of areas of unnecessary duplication between widening access activities within institutions and the regional Reaching Wider Partnerships.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.9 Reaching Wider activities have provided added value in terms of delivering Welsh Assembly Government targets.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.10 It is not always clear which activities should fall under the Reaching Wider initiative and which should fall under widening access.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.11 The Reaching Wider Partnership has successfully reached those in the 4 target areas who could benefit from higher education.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.12 Defining groups on the basis of Communities First areas is the most appropriate means of securing widening access objectives.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

25.13 Reaching Wider activities offer the most efficient way of addressing the barriers to participation in higher education faced by individuals from the 4 target areas.	1	2	3	4	5	
Please outline in the box your reasons for allocating the above score including examples or other evidence to support your answer:						

26. Has the Partnership received any external funding to support Reaching Wider activities? If yes please provide details in the box below of the source of the funding, the activities it funded and which other institutions were involved.

27. Please outline in the box below how Reaching Wider Partnerships are addressing the issue of mainstreaming activities to ensure sustainability.

Please summarise below how the Reaching Wider Partnership decides which activities fall under the Reaching Wider initiative and which fall within the remit of Widening Access Strategies.

28. Please outline in the box below comments you may have relating to barriers to participation that still remain and/or new or additional widening access and Reaching Wider activities and policies that you consider are required to address them.

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE – YOUR HELP AND CO-OPERATION ARE MUCH APPRECIATED!

ANNEX 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 'GOING TO UNIVERSITY FROM CARE'

This is a list of recommendations targeted at higher education institutions from the 'Going to University from Care' report (Frank Buttle Trust & Institute of Education, University of London, May 2005)

Recommendations: 'Going to University from Care'
36. All institutions should develop a comprehensive policy relating to young people in or leaving care.
37. All initiatives and publicity aimed at applicants or students from disadvantaged groups should specifically refer to care leavers.
38. More institutions should develop compact arrangements with local authorities to increase participation of care leavers. Universities and colleges running open days and summer schools should ensure that young people in care are specifically invited.
39. Admissions tutors need to understand that it is an exceptional achievement for care leavers to get to the point of applying to university from care and that examination grades may not reflect the young person's potential.
40. Widening participation officers should attend after care workshops and training events on the care system and the needs of care leavers.
41. Care leavers should be given priority for on-campus accommodation and for hardship funds.
42. Student Welfare/Support Services should contact new students known to have been in care and be proactive in offering any necessary help with financial, study or personal problems. They should be alerted to danger signals such as falling behind with assignments.
43. HEIs should ensure that successful applicants who have been in care know before they arrive about any additional grants or bursaries that might be available to them so that they can apply in good time.

ANNEX 6: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UK 2003/04

Figures quoted below are drawn from statistics published on the HESA website.

The figures published for the academic year 2003/04 show that the Welsh HE sector performed better than the UK as a whole in recruiting young, full-time undergraduate entrants from state schools, lower socio-economic groups and neighbourhoods with low participation in HE.

The Welsh sector recruited a higher percentage of part-time undergraduate entrants who were from a low participation background and had no previous experience of HE than any other part of the UK.

The main results for Wales in 2003/04 are:

- 92% of young full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh higher education institutions (HEIs) were from state schools or colleges, compared with 87% for the UK as a whole.
- 17% of young full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh HEIs were from low participation neighbourhoods, compared to 14% for the UK.
- 30% of young full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh HEIs were from the four lowest socio-economic groups, which is slightly above the proportion for the UK.
- 19% of mature full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh HEIs had no previous HE experience and were from a low participation neighbourhood, compared to 16% for the UK.
- 4% of full-time undergraduate students in Wales were in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance, compared to 3% for the UK.
- The proportion of modules that part-time undergraduate students at Welsh HEIs passed in 2003/04 was 90%, compared to 86% in 2002/03.