

**HEFCW's National Widening Access
Conference *The Future Direction of
Widening Access: Purpose, Policy and
Practice*. 2 December 2014**

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Key points from the Minister for Education and Skills' speech included:

1. Emphasising that the core priorities for Higher Education (HE) remained jobs and growth, equality and equity, and a fair and sustainable funding model;
2. Recognising the importance of HE for all who might benefit, regardless of their background;
3. Highlighting the importance of stronger partnerships with schools to better serve the interests of learners and communities and the need for a coordinated programme of action to raise learners' ambitions and drive improvements in disadvantaged students' performance through planned and structured new relationships between schools, colleges and Welsh universities to ensure effective learner transition to, through and beyond HE;
4. Confirming that WA was a long term, all-age agenda contributing to tackling issues of economic and social deprivation and to driving forward the economy of Wales;
5. Confirming a long standing commitment to support and promote part-time learning and Welsh medium provision;
6. Recognising that performance indicators demonstrated that Wales had a record of success in WA, but fresh thinking could improve engagement with disadvantaged learners; embed initiatives like Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) in the educational landscape; and extend HEIs' work with FEIs, schools, family and intergenerational learning, adult returners and communities;
7. Commending all Welsh HEIs for attaining the Buttle UK quality mark for care leavers and encouraging HEIs to do more to help them achieve their potential;
8. Recognising that retention was as important as recruitment, with learning underpinned by impartial information, advice and guidance to inform learner choice;
9. Recognising examples of effective practice to be developed further, including: First Campus Reaching Wider Partnership work with Schools Challenge

Cymru; the dual university model in SW Wales; UHOVI; Bangor University's partnership with Coleg Llandrillo; and Energy island partnerships;

10. Noting that traditional models of campus based delivery were set to change, with universities needing to respond to technological innovation, increasing expectations of students, structural reform and funding changes. These challenges represented opportunities for a small country;
11. Acknowledging that budgets were extremely tight and a robust evidence base was required to inform public investments and policy interventions;
12. Querying whether current geographically-based WA measures remained appropriate;
13. Considering that more could be done to improve universities' engagement with schools as too few children from deprived backgrounds saw university as a natural step, and did not progress to university. HE/schools partnerships could create planned, structured WA approaches involving schools, colleges, universities and parents, with universities being more involved with the development of the pupil offer and providing planned, interactions for pupils starting in years 9/10 and ensuring that primary school children had an understanding of HE and that the most deprived pupils aimed for HE;
14. Outlining the need for a more collaborative and supportive relationship between Government and Welsh universities with universities' work being rooted in their communities; playing a bigger role in the social and cultural life of their community; and developing a sense of a distinctive HE community working with the Welsh Government to in addressing shared challenges. Vice Chancellors had responded positively to the Government's challenge to create a social partnership.
15. Considering that Welsh HE did not recognise its potential to radically change the Wales of tomorrow, transforming the economy and being a major player in modern Wales.
16. Committing the Welsh Government to continuing to work with the sector in a genuine partnership to achieve the ambitions for HE and learners in Wales.