

Cylchlythyr

Circular

Developing a Regional Dimension to the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education

Date: 16 February 2010
Reference: W10/06HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales; Principals of further education institutions in Wales; post-16 providers in Wales;
Copied to: Local authorities; Sector Skills Councils; employers and their representative groups and other interested parties
Response by: 31 March 2010 to rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk
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This circular sets out for consultation our proposals for developing a regional dimension to the planning and delivery of higher education.

For our Future, the 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales included the expectation that the Welsh Assembly Government, working with stakeholders and HEFCW, would 'develop a regional dimension to planning and delivery of higher education'.

In seeking views in this consultation, we have set out the key issues we have considered and the factors we have taken into account in developing our proposals. We then go on to discuss the process which we will adopt to implement regional strategies and we give an indication of our expectations about reconfiguration and collaboration to meet the requirements of the *For our Future* Strategy.

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Introduction

1. This circular sets out for consultation our proposals for developing a regional dimension to the planning and delivery of higher education.
2. *For our Future, the 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*¹ included the expectation that the Welsh Assembly Government, working with stakeholders and HEFCW, would 'develop a regional dimension to planning and delivery of higher education'.
3. In seeking views in this consultation, we have set out the key issues we have considered and the factors we have taken into account in developing our proposals. We then go on to discuss the process which we will adopt to implement regional strategies and we give an indication of our expectations about reconfiguration and collaboration to meet the requirements of the *For our Future* Strategy.
4. This circular invites views from higher education institutions, further education institutions, other post-16 providers, local authorities, employers and their representative groups, and other interested parties. Responses should be sent to Rachel O’Gorman Rachel.OGorman@hefcw.ac.uk by 31 March 2010. An invitation to submit regional strategies, together with related guidance, is scheduled for publication in May, taking account of the responses to this circular.

Background

5. *For our Future* is a new higher education strategy and plan for Wales. It builds upon and replaces the previous *Reaching Higher* strategy (2002). The two areas of social justice and supporting a buoyant economy form the basis of the Strategy. Targeting these two areas, the Assembly Government has set out a range of actions to advance the vision set out in the Strategy. HEFCW is seen as a key partner in delivery and is remitted to implement the plan.
6. In the Strategy we are asked to
‘explore, develop and co-ordinate, in concert with the HE community, the development of a regional planning and delivery structure in Wales which can identify and tackle need while demonstrating the best use of resources’ [para 76i].
7. In support of this expectation, there are some other references in the Strategy to the regional dimension which have informed the development of our proposals. These include:

¹ [<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091214hestrategyen.pdf>]

- ‘This will be an important part of creating a higher education system approach, and will target the eradication of nugatory local competition and wasteful duplication of provision’ [para 41].
 - It will also support ‘the development of ... critical mass... in Wales’ [para 41].
 - ‘through collaboration, local and regional needs and priorities are better identified and met’ with ‘clearer progression pathways to higher education in place from school, community, workplace, and FE’ [para 42].
 - ‘A national higher education system for Wales will be created: different providers will have different strengths and different missions but will work to complement and enhance their individual strengths and missions. They will form a wider and more coherent system of providers, including FE colleges as well as HE institutions, working together and equipped to deliver sustained high quality higher education’ [para 36].
 - There is also a wish to see ‘more examples of the type of approach being demonstrated in the Heads of the Valleys, where low HE participation and skills is being tackled through collaborative partnership and multi-sectoral approaches, within an overall context of regional economic and community regeneration’ [para 7].
8. *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales* (2008) set out the Welsh Assembly Government’s intention to gain plans from providers to improve learning opportunities for all post-16 learners. The focus thus far has been primarily on post-16 providers (schools, workbased learning providers and FE institutions), although some higher education institutions have been involved. *Transformation – Y Siwrna*² (2009) details actions taken to implement the post-16 phase of the transformation policy and highlights the intention to extend the policy to cover all phases of education and training. This document is one of the means for implementing that intention in relation to higher education provision.
9. In developing a regional agenda for higher education in Wales, it is important to be clear about what it covers, and what it doesn’t:
- The aim is to improve provision regionally, especially for learners who, for whatever reason, are geographically constrained, and for employers who are seeking higher education support, of whatever kind, locally;
 - It is about reaching agreements with partners through which to secure better subject availability (especially in subjects deemed from time to time to be priorities), easier geographical access, clearer

² [<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125transformationen.pdf>]

progression routes, and overall a higher degree of responsiveness to local needs;

- It is also about working with partners to enable employers to find their way quickly to relevant local support, regardless of their initial point of enquiry;
 - It is about better use of the resources available for delivery of HE across Wales through engagement and enhancement of the complementary strengths of different providers;
 - It is not about constraining higher education institutions to work only within their region. Nothing in this policy development is intended to curtail the wide and important range of activities currently being pursued in teaching, research and third mission on a Wales-wide, UK-wide or international basis, except where it is clear that there is wasteful local duplication, and associated nugatory competition.
10. Examples already exist in various parts of Wales of the practices that are being sought, so there would be value in institutions/partners comparing notes as they develop responses.

What do we mean by 'regional' in this context?

- **It should be measurable.**
11. In order to develop a planning and delivery system, we must be able to align regional boundaries with that which is measurable. Whilst boundaries may be permeable or overlapping, we need to have access to a comprehensive evidence base in order to inform planning, delivery and monitoring of outcomes. The need for robust mechanisms for determining allocations and measuring outcomes is particularly important when considering potential to impact on funding methodologies.
12. In the UK and international context in which higher education operates, comparator regions for Wales include regions in England and Scotland, as well as Northern Ireland. However, looking locally, there are many ways in which 'region' could be defined.
- **It should build on existing HEFCW-funded collaborations and initiatives**
13. HEFCW is already supporting a variety of regional collaborations through our initiatives and funding. In developing a regional dimension to planning and delivery of higher education, we would wish to build upon current collaborations where possible. Current regional collaborations supported by HEFCW include the following.
14. Our Reaching Wider (RW) Initiative, which has operated since 2003, is currently based on four regional partnerships,

- South East (First Campus: HE regionally-based members: University of Glamorgan (Glamorgan); University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC); University of Wales, Newport (UWN); Cardiff University (CU));
 - South West (Swansea University (SU); Swansea Metropolitan University (SMU); Trinity University College Carmarthen (TUCC));
 - West and Mid Wales (Aberystwyth University (AU); University of Wales, Lampeter (UWL));
 - North Wales (Bangor University (BU); Glyndŵr University (Glyndŵr)).
15. We have encouraged the four partnerships to work together and have funded various pan-Wales activities across the partnerships. The Open University in Wales is a member of two Partnerships and we would expect it to be a member of all future regional RW partnerships. We have indicated our intention to review the structures of the partnerships. This will take into account the forthcoming merger between TUCC and UWL, which cuts across two of the current partnerships and is likely to see a reduction in the partnerships from four to three.
16. We are supporting the reconfiguration of Initial Teacher Training into three regional Centres of Teacher Education, based in the South-East (UWIC and UWN); South West (SMU and TUCC); and North and West (AU and BU), including the preparation of joint Centre ITT strategies;
17. Through our Third Mission funding we are supporting various regional collaborations including the Aber-Bangor Skills Centre (AU and BU) and the Dragon Innovation Partnership (SU, SMU and TUCC).
18. Our Reconfiguration and Collaboration Funding supports a range of collaborative developments across Wales. There is a regional dimension to some of these activities: the mergers between the University of Wales College of Medicine and CU; the merger between Glamorgan and Merthyr College, and subsequently the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama; the merger between TUCC and UWL; the South West Wales Higher Education Partnership (SWWHEP) supporting shared services between the three higher education institutions in South West Wales (SU, SMU and TUCC); the Aberystwyth and Bangor Research and Enterprise Partnership (AU and BU); collaborative working and capital developments between Glyndŵr and Deeside College in relation to horticultural provision; the University of the Heads of the Valleys Institute (Glamorgan/Merthyr College, UWN and Coleg Gwent).
19. In all these HEFCW-supported collaborations, and more broadly, we are beginning to see a consolidation of activities primarily around South East Wales; South West Wales and Mid and North Wales.
- **It should take into account Welsh Assembly Government regional policies where appropriate**

20. The Welsh Assembly Government document, *People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan update 2008*³, defines six regions within Wales: Central Wales; North East Wales - Border and Coast; North West Wales - Eryri a Mon; Pembrokeshire – the Haven; South East Wales – Capital Region; Swansea Bay – Waterfront & Western Valleys.
21. Most universities, but not all, are members of the Spatial Plan Area Groups. The fact that HE membership is not comprehensive may be because there is no obvious alignment between the areas of operation for the relevant HE institutions and the spatial plan areas. In addition, the Spatial Plan’s indication of ‘fuzzy boundaries’ which are not defined by administrative boundaries, makes it difficult for us to utilise these areas unamended because of the need for defined measures.
22. Other Assembly Government strategies, particularly in the field of education, set out other regional structures which are also pertinent to the operation of higher education institutions. For example, in education: Young Peoples Partnerships (aged 11-25) (22 partnerships in local authorities); Adult Community Learning Partnerships (aged 19+) (9 proposed partnerships); Welsh for Adults Centres (6 centres across Wales, 5 of which are located in HE institutions). Also of relevance are the designated ‘Communities First’ areas (now 188 Communities First areas across Wales), which are incorporated within several of HEFCW’s widening access initiatives⁴.
23. Having investigated the different ways in which boundaries are set across Wales in terms of Welsh Assembly Government policies, it is clear that regions are defined to meet the requirements of the particular policy. Therefore, while taking account of these various approaches, our definition of region will seek to build on the partnership arrangements we already have in place to meet the particular requirements of developing the higher education system.
 - **It should take account of the physical location and type of institutions**
24. We have considered the location of both higher and further education institutions in Wales. While we recognise the growing importance of distance and technology-enhanced learning, as well as the pan-Wales role of the Open University and of the Coleg Ffederal covering Welsh medium provision, once established, a key consideration in determining progression would be ‘travel to study’ time (see para 32 below).
25. We have also taken into account the stated missions of the higher education institutions, which vary in their relative emphases on teaching, research, widening access and/or third mission and in terms of the priority of their international, national and local operations.

³ [<http://wales.gov.uk/about/programmeforgovernment/strategy/spatial/?lang=en>]

⁴ [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy_areas/widening_access/widening_access.aspx]

Our proposals

26. We therefore propose that we should work on the basis of three regions which are defined as follows in terms of higher education institutions:
- **South-East Wales**, covering Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff and University of Wales, Newport;
 - **South-West Wales**, covering Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan University, Trinity University College, Carmarthen and University of Wales, Lampeter;
 - **Mid and North Wales**, covering Aberystwyth University, Bangor University and Glyndŵr University.
27. In each of these geographical areas we intend to work with both higher education, further education and post-16 providers to develop progression routes through to higher education and to promote collaboration between HE providers – in both the HE and post-16 sectors – in a range of policy areas. We would expect the Open University in Wales to be part of all three regions. Regions will also need to take account of the pan Wales Coleg Ffederal, as it develops.
28. Recognising, as our analysis above does, that no definition of regions fits all circumstances, we are open to the possibility of institutions also being involved, where it makes sense, in regions outside that to which we have attached them.
29. We have not set out here any expectations in relation to FE Colleges, since they are funded primarily by the Welsh Assembly Government. However, in the delivery of higher education provision in further education institutions, we will wish to work closely with Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru, which operates with three similar regional networks. These are North; South West; and South East.

Q1 Do you support the definition of ‘region’ which we are adopting? If not, please set out your alternative proposal and the evidence for this.

What do we mean by ‘need’ in this context?

30. In considering this question we looked particularly at two types of evidence: an analysis of higher education students (including cross-border flows) against areas of population within Wales; and work undertaken by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to develop a ‘common evidence base’ for assessing proposals for new higher education provision⁵.

⁵ [<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/challenge/evidence/>]

31. In looking at the ratio of higher education students (at Welsh HEIs and directly funded FE Colleges) to population, we considered
 - Level and mode: Full-time, part-time and postgraduate numbers;
 - Type of provider: HEI, franchised out, directly-funded;
 - Domicile (within region, within rest of Wales, within rest of UK, overseas);
 - Cross border flows
32. Factors from the work undertaken by HEFCE on the Common Evidence Base:
 - The size, nature and location of existing and planned HE provision: looking at the density of provision in an area;
 - An estimation of the local zone for a HE delivery location: the level of provision in terms of 'local' provision is defined in terms of travel times: 'local' provision being defined as less than 45 minutes travel from the delivery site;
 - The population who could benefit from extra provision (young and mature population densities and the skill level of the mature population)
 - Geography and area classifications: measures of disadvantage (low levels of participation in HE; low levels of income; high levels of unemployment; low levels of HE qualifications).
33. Some other factors which we may wish to take into account, include
 - Subject mix and alignment with local employment and Welsh Assembly Government priorities;
 - FE and other Post-16 provision to HE progression rates in the region and beyond;

Our proposals

34. We need to undertake further work to establish our evidence base, taking account of the factors above and any issues or other factors identified in the consultation. This will help us to identify areas of regional need and better define measurable regional boundaries.
35. However, we need to implement any new arrangements by 2011/12.
36. We therefore plan to invite providers to collaborate to commence the work of identifying need at a local and regional level in Wales, using available quantitative and qualitative information and consulting with local stakeholders, including employers, within the region. This will inform our consideration of any future adjustments to the funding of provision on a regional basis, supported by the quantitative and qualitative evidence base as it develops.

Q2 Do you support the way in which we expect regional ‘need’ to be identified? If not, are there other factors which should be taken into account?

Regional strategies – Our Proposals

37. After reviewing the responses to this consultation, we propose to invite all higher education providers (HEIs and FECs) to collaborate to prepare a regional strategy for all modes of HE provision in their region. We would expect the Open University to be involved in this process in each of the three regions. The strategies should look across widening access, learning and teaching (including Welsh medium) and third mission policy areas but would not need to include research. We would expect the strategies also to address possible collaborative approaches to capital investment and shared services. Using available sources of data and following liaison with local stakeholders (local authorities, post-16 providers, employers, schools, etc), the strategies should aim to

- Identify the need for higher education provision in the defined region, covering size and type of provision, subject breakdown, mode of study available, etc, taking into account the type of factors listed above;
- Summarise the outcome of an audit of HE provision in the region across all providers, including the Open University;
- Identify any new provision required in the region (type, subject, level, mode), for which there is clear market demand, together with a summary of market evidence, and how this could be developed;
- Summarise the outcome of an audit of local progression routes and opportunities from CQFW level 3 and work-based provision (including apprenticeships) into HE provision, following liaison with the relevant stakeholders;
- Identify areas of duplication together with plans to work together to minimise nugatory local competition and wasteful duplication;
- Show how the partners would work with employers and Sector Skills Councils, as appropriate, to identify where joint working could help to meet regional skills needs;
- Identify collaborative capital developments and shared services which can support the regional strategy;
- Take account of the Welsh language and the need for Welsh medium provision, including the role of the Coleg Ffederal, as it develops;
- Detail the ongoing and formal liaison arrangements put in place to facilitate the regional collaboration;
- Provide an assessment of the equality and diversity impact of the proposals put forward in the regional strategy.

38. We plan to publish an invitation to submit regional strategies, together with formal guidance, in the spring with the aim that strategies should be submitted by November 2010. We intend to publish further information about our evidence base with the guidance circular which we will expect to inform each region's deliberations. We will work iteratively with regional partnerships to analyse and develop the strategies. (For the avoidance of doubt: we are not expecting the immediate development of strategies in response to this consultation circular, though institutions may well wish to begin their thinking and discussion with partners).
39. We intend that some elements of funding will support the regional strategies. The regional dimension will feed into the review of our Funding Methodologies which we will be conducting in the light of *For our Future*. We shall have regard, in so doing, to maintaining a reasonable balance across all aspects of funding. Funding will come initially from the following sources:
- Efficiencies generated by partnership working, especially where, through redistribution of activity, these generate economies of scale;
 - Funded credits generated by top-slicing from those currently available, as part of the strategic use of core funding (as indicated in the recent consultation on changes to funding arrangements (Circular W09/31/HE, para 16 (v) and (vii));
 - Subject to further policy development with the Welsh Assembly Government, potential credits associated with partnership-delivered Foundation Degrees, within the evolving WAG priority for Foundation Degrees (see *For our Future*, paras 62-64) and funded from monies released as a result of the Jones' Review of Higher Education in Wales.
 - Regional allocations of funding to support specific strategies (eg, Third Mission, ITT, as indicated in paragraphs 17 and 18 above).
40. We expect to allocate the funded credits, or any other form of funding, initially identified to support regional developments between the three regions on the basis of detailed proposals (including market evidence) assessed on a competitive basis against published criteria. Successful proposals will receive funded credits in 2011/12 which will be rolled-in in subsequent years.

Q3 Do you support the way in which we plan to take forward the planning and delivery of higher education through the use of regional strategies? If not, are there any amendments which you would wish to suggest or do you have an alternative approach to recommend?

Reconfiguration and Collaboration – Our Expectations

41. The proposals in this document complement existing policy on reconfiguration and collaboration⁶. Whereas in the past this policy has been confined to collaboration and mergers primarily between higher education institutions, the Assembly Government's response to the Wales Audit Office report on *Collaboration between Higher Education Institutions*⁷ encourages HEFCW to consider also the possibility of supporting wider partnerships, where these fit the overall policy drive.
42. The WAO report noted that 'collaboration activity has not fully addressed concerns about the continuing small size of some institutions reducing their competitiveness'. We agree.
43. Against this background, and with the new impetus given by the challenge of *For our Future* (in all respects, not only the regional dimension), we propose soon to restate our view on what the higher education system in Wales needs to achieve in the coming years, what specific targets will enable progress to be monitored, and what the conditions of success (including structural considerations) are likely to be. We will set out this position as we develop our next Corporate Strategy.

Involving our stakeholders

44. We are committed to making equality a core issue in developing and implementing policies and services, and evaluating and refining those approaches to advance the equality agenda. We have a legal responsibility to assess the impact of our policies on equality groups and to set out how we will monitor or address any possible negative impact. An equality impact assessment (EIA) will improve HEFCW's work by making sure we do not discriminate in our services, functions, policies and employment and ensuring, where possible, we do all we can to promote equality and good relations between different groups. It also helps us when drafting policies to carefully consider the likely impact of our work and take action to improve it and ensure that, as far as possible, we eliminate any negative consequences.
45. We recognise that the involvement of disabled people is critical to the success of our work and that the Disability Discrimination Act specifically requires us to go beyond merely consulting disabled stakeholders. If you are disabled or have experience working with disabled people in the sector and would like to be more actively involved in our policy making process – from providing feedback or contributing to equality impact

⁶<http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/W09%2032HE%20Reconfiguration%20and%20Collaboration.pdf>

⁷http://www.wao.gov.uk/assets/englishdocuments/Collaboration_between_HE_institutions_Eng.pdf

assessments – please contact us at equality@hefcw.ac.uk to be added to our stakeholder database. Any information is stored safely and confidentially and will not be shared with institutions or third parties.

Consultation Responses

46. We invite responses from higher education institutions, further education colleges and other post-16 providers to the following questions:
- Q1** Do you support the definition of ‘region’ which we are adopting? If not, please set out your alternative proposal and the evidence for this.
- Q2** Do you support the way in which we expect regional ‘need’ to be identified? If not, are there other factors which should be taken into account?
- Q3** Do you support the way in which we plan to take forward the planning and delivery of higher education through the use of regional strategies? If not, are there any amendments which you would wish to suggest or do you have an alternative approach to recommend?
47. Responses should be sent to Rachel O’Gorman, Rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk by **31 March 2010**.
48. Any queries should be addressed to Celia Hunt or Dr Ewen Brierley (tel 029 2068 2224 or 029 2068 2291; e-mail celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk or ewen.brierley@hefcw.ac.uk