



A review of Welsh institutional
Widening Access Strategies 2006/07
to 2008/09 and the Reaching Wider
Funded Proposals 2008/10

**A review of Welsh institutional Widening Access Strategies 2006/07 to
2008/09 and the *Reaching Wider* Funded Proposals 2008/10**

by

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Executive Summary

This summary presents the major findings and recommendations arising from the review of Welsh institutional widening access strategies 2006 to 2010 and Reaching Wider proposals 2008 to 2010. The review was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and carried out by the Higher Education Academy (the Academy) between November 2008 and April 2009.

Aims and objectives of the review

The principal aims of the review by the Higher Education Academy were to inform the HE sector in Wales and appropriate departments of the Welsh Assembly Government on progress in widening access and to contribute to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales's (HEFCW) strategic thinking on widening access and the Reaching Wider Partnerships. To achieve the aims the Academy team compared widening access strategies and Reaching Wider proposals with Welsh Assembly Government policy objectives and considered approaches to widening access within HE institutions and regional partnerships.

Context

In preparing the review, attention was given to the background and context for widening access within Wales. This included referring to the following key policies:

- Welsh Assembly Government policies outlined in *Reaching Higher, Higher Education and the Learning Country; The Learning Country: Vision into Action; Wales a Vibrant Economy; Skills That Work for Wales* and its associated *Action Plan; Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales; A New Approach to Adult Community Learning (ACL)*;
- *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy - World Class Skills* (Leitch report);
- *Promise and Performance: The Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales in the Context of the Learning Country: Vision into Action* (Webb report);
- *Part-time higher education study in Wales* (Graham report);
- Phase 1 report: *Review of Higher Education in Wales* (Jones report).

At the time of writing the Phase 2 of the *Review of Higher Education in Wales* (Jones report) was not available. It should also be noted that the institutional widening access strategies and the initiatives of Reaching Wider Partnerships were developed prior to the current difficult socio-economic and financial context.

The widening access activities within Welsh HE institutions and the Reaching Wider Partnerships have sought to address the vision of the Welsh Assembly Government set out in *Reaching Higher* in '*...providing higher education for all those who have the ability to benefit from it*'. In order to develop, encourage

and guide widening access initiatives, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has provided targeted funding, supported the Reaching Wider Partnerships, provided guidance and advice circulars and reports, and monitored provision.

Institutional approaches to widening access

This review showed that higher education institutions in Wales were very strongly committed to widening access and had developed approaches to widening access that related to their missions.

The review considered that widening access strategies encompassed strategic priorities and direction as well as operational detail and that the strategies were in a form which might not be easily accessible to institutional staff in general. Most institutions had sound leadership arrangements in place to guide and direct central policies and approaches to widening access. At the present time there did not appear to be strong devolvement of widening access management to academic schools and departments.

Target groups identified in institutional strategies were strongly influenced by Welsh Assembly Government priorities: Communities First wards, all age groups, ethnic and other minority groups, disabled students, Welsh speakers and young people with a care background. Widening access strategies showed that all the Welsh institutions were working to improve student support and retention and some had developed complementary retention strategies. In terms of progressing Welsh medium teaching and learning, the sector has established a national strategy and framework for achieving a step-change in the volume and range of provision.

Disability, equality and diversity

Institutional widening access strategies were very varied in the extent of their referral to disability, equality and diversity and generally an opportunity to place inclusive practice within the broad context of widening access was not fully exploited. Data collection for equality and diversity did not generally appear to be used to build an evidence-base to enable effective comparison across an institution or to monitor progress for students, programmes and academic units.

Development of Reaching Wider Partnerships

The activities of the Reaching Wider Partnerships focussed on the key priority groups identified above. Documentation showed that the Partnerships had been very successful in generating a considerable range of activity and over the years this has led to the delivery of several hundred events to several thousand participants. Within the Reaching Wider proposals there was generally no more than a mention of the non-HE partners and so it was difficult to gauge the extent of their strategic input and the effectiveness of FE and HE strategic collaboration within the Reaching Wider Partnerships framework.

It was apparent that the Reaching Wider Partnerships needed to continue to introduce more systematic tracking and monitoring of students to demonstrate effective interventions and provide evidence of the success of the Reaching Wider initiative.

Funding

Overall, institutions paid close attention to reporting on the use of HEFCW funding and demonstrating accountability. It could be argued that most of an institution's internal widening access activity could now be considered sustainable as it formed an important part of an institution's mainstream business (e.g. student admissions and progression).

Conversely, it could be argued that activity associated with the Reaching Wider initiative was generally short term and was totally dependent on additional Welsh Assembly Government initiative funding. Without this funding there would be, arguably, a large question mark over the sustainability of this initiative.

Monitoring and evaluation

Generally, the targets for widening access identified by institutions were limited to a listing of events and activities with, in most instances, an estimate of the number of events and participants. This lack of strategic and measurable targets and robust data placed an emphasis on inputs rather than high-level, strategic outcomes. Furthermore, there was limited reference in institutional widening access strategies to evaluating the impact of the strategies.

General conclusions

The documentation and evidence studied in the review demonstrated a very strong commitment within Welsh institutions to widening access and also demonstrated a good measure of success in delivering a wide range of courses and events. Analysis of the short, medium and long term targets, such as they were, showed that considerable resources were devoted to supporting students within institutions. Widening access strategies indicated that Welsh HE institutions were working to improve student support and retention by moving towards providing strong longitudinal support centred on student need throughout their time in higher education. The effectiveness of this support was reflected in the high overall rate of student satisfaction in the Welsh sector as a whole. In addition, UK-wide, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics to 2007/08 showed the Welsh HE sector consistently outperforming other UK HE sectors, over a number of years, on a range of performance indicators for under-represented groups.

The Reaching Wider initiative supported by HEFCW has enabled the development of a considerable range of activities and interventions involving

further education colleges, secondary schools, adults, local communities, government agencies and local businesses.

HEFCW has provided effective support, guidance and funding for widening access activities and initiatives both within individual institutions and the Reaching Wider Partnerships.

Overall, the HE sector in Wales during the time of the *Reaching Higher* strategy has expanded considerably the opportunities for all those with the ability to engage with higher education. Based on entrant statistics the Welsh HE sector could be regarded as the most successful in the UK in attracting under-represented groups.

The Welsh approach involving institutional widening access strategies, regional Reaching Wider Partnerships and articulation strategies to join the two together represents an integrated and evolved approach to widening access.

Along with these obvious elements of success the current review has identified opportunities for further development of policy and practice in widening access. Of particular importance is:

- the need for HE institutions to develop more effective evaluation of the success and impact of initiatives and activities with, for example, better tracking of students through Reaching Wider programmes and events into higher education;
- consideration of providing more student-focused programmes in the Reaching Wider initiative which support students through a sequential range of pre-HE engagements and onto FE/ HE;
- the need to ensure the sustainability of activities currently supported through the relatively short-term funding available to Reaching Wider Partnerships.

Recommendations

Higher Education Institutions should:

1. Work towards a whole institution approach to widening access, taking account of equality and diversity, student support, retention and success and progression beyond HE (paragraphs 6.33, 7.13, 7.14, 7.21).
2. Continue to ensure that there is clear senior management leadership, commitment to, and engagement in, this agenda, to continue promote institutional cultural change (paragraph 6.31).
3. Work with all staff to integrate widening access and equality and diversity in all institutional policies, functions and activities, and through strategic collaboration (paragraph 6.33).

4. Systematically collect and monitor data on widening access, equality and student success to identify trends and priorities for intervention and change (paragraphs 6.43, 6.44, 7.15, 7.30, 7.31).
5. Use institutional data, evaluation evidence and equality impact assessments to examine the potential and actual impact of interventions, policy, and practice (paragraphs 5.12, 6.53).
6. Provide sustained opportunities for students (including those from widening access groups) to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes within the institution (paragraph 7.40).

Reaching Wider Partnerships should:

7. Map current and future engagement between HE institutions, between FE and HE, and other educational providers, to identify progression pathways, especially in vocational areas (paragraph 6.42).
8. Provide a cumulative and developmental programme of activities for engaging groups of people of all ages to enable them to progress to and through higher education (paragraph 9.32).
9. Encourage Reaching Wider staff and partnership institutions to act upon the challenges identified by the regional audits and, in particular, to share expertise and effective policies and practices within their own institutions and across the sector (paragraphs 9.50, 9.61).
10. Consider a greater role for partners other than HEIs to lead on, and provide additional funding for these partnership activities (paragraphs 9.11, 11.24).

HEFCW and/or the Welsh Assembly Government should:

11. Request institutions and partnerships to produce and submit succinct widening access strategies that provide an overview of their work in this area (i.e. covering widening access, equality, retention, student success and links to other institutional strategies). These strategies should include intended outcomes and milestones in the short, medium and long term. More detailed information should be provided as appended documents. (paragraph 6.11).
12. Develop guidelines, in consultation with the sector, on identifying and targeting widening access groups, tracking and monitoring student progress, defining outcomes and demonstrating impact (paragraphs 6.53, 9.32, 9.51, 12.33).
13. Encourage HE institutions to systematically collect, analyse and use common data on widening access, equality and student success to inform their work in this area. This support should take account of the developing MIAP system (paragraphs 6.43, 6.44, 7.30, 7.31, 12.33).

14. Require institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships to provide annual monitoring reports and updates which, for example, show their response to the Welsh Assembly agendas, collaborative activities, use of funding and as well as the effectiveness of their interventions. These reports would form the basis of widening access strategic dialogues between HEIs and HEFCW (paragraphs 5.12, 11.10, 12.30).
15. Review the configuration of the Reaching Wider Partnerships to optimise the distribution of resources and the longer term viability of the regional Partnerships (paragraph 9.14). Consider the longer term sustainability of the Reaching Wider initiative through consultation with HE institutions and their Reaching Wider partners (paragraphs 9.14 11.23).

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and objectives of the review

1.10 The principal aims of the review by the Higher Education Academy were to:

- contribute to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales's (HEFCW) strategic thinking on widening access (WA) and Reaching Wider (RW) policies and practices;
- inform appropriate departments of the Welsh Assembly Government, the Reaching Wider Partnerships, and Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on the progress and achievements of the WA and RW initiatives.

In addition, the review also aimed to provide information on the UK-wide contextual setting for widening access to allow comparison with the Welsh HE sector.

1.11 To achieve the above aims the Academy team worked to the following objectives:

- comparing widening access strategies and Reaching Wider proposals with Welsh Assembly Government policy objectives to identify progress towards achieving these objectives;
- mapping of practice and systematic comparison of activities and approaches within HEIs and regional Partnerships;
- comparing, where possible, Welsh strategic approaches to widening access with widening participation/access developments elsewhere in the UK;
- providing findings, comparisons of practice, conclusions and recommendations to inform the future strategic development of widening access in Wales.

1.2 Approach

1.20 In addition to reviewing the institutional widening access strategies for 2006 to 2009 and the Reaching Wider proposals 2008 to 2010, the Academy team has studied a number of key documents (see Appendix 1). These documents contained some information on disability, equality and diversity. However it has not been possible, owing to time constraints, to study additional institutional documentation in these areas (e.g. Single Equality Schemes and separate Disability Development Plans). Further information on institutional practice was gained from the recent Arad Consulting evaluation and this review will refer to the findings of the Arad reports. Information on the progress made by institutions and the Partnerships was also gained from a study of annual monitoring statements (AMS) and Reaching Wider regional critical audits.

1.21 Guidelines for the review were set in consultation with HEFCW officers. At the time of writing the second phase of the Professor Merfyn Jones review

had been submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government, but it had not been made public and a Ministerial response had not been received.

1.22 As indicated above, the review was a desk study of the comparatively small sample set of Welsh HEI widening access strategies and four Reaching Wider Partnership proposals. Within the time and resources available for this review there has been no intention to provide recommendations tailored to individual institutions and Partnerships. Given the somewhat historic nature of the strategies and proposals reviewed, the reviewers are confident that some institutions and Partnerships will have in train actions that address some of the issues raised in the recommendations of the review.

1.23 The review was carried out by the Higher Education Academy by Professor Howard Colley, Dr Helen May, and Professor Liz Thomas.

1.3 Widening access and widening participation

1.30 There are numerous definitions of widening access and widening participation and there is much debate about the similarities and differences between these two terms. In this report widening access has been used within a context that has been defined by the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW. The Welsh approach is based upon *increasing opportunities for people from a diverse range of backgrounds to benefit from higher education*. The Welsh Assembly Government *Reaching Higher* strategy has also provided further explanation in stating its recognition that *widening access to those who were traditionally under-represented in higher education brings new challenges for student retention*'. So, in general terms, widening access in Wales with its linkage to social justice, recruitment, student progression and retention is broadly comparable to the widening participation agenda in England. For example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England has outlined the WP remit: *'to raise aspirations and educational attainment among people from under-represented communities to prepare them for higher education, ensure success on their programme of study, improve their employment prospects and open possibilities for postgraduate study, and give them opportunities to return to learning throughout their lives'* (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/>).

2. History and development of widening access in Wales

2.10 In 2002, the Welsh Assembly Government published a ten year strategy for higher education in Wales: *Reaching Higher, Higher Education and the Learning Country* which set out its strategic vision of how the HE sector would contribute to the achievement of its programme of education and lifelong learning to 2010. The report recognised at that time that the HE sector in Wales was making a significant contribution to improving access with 16% of young full-time undergraduate entrants coming from low participation neighbourhoods in Wales, compared to 13% in the UK. Nevertheless, the strategy maintained that the HE sector should continue to break down the perceived barriers to disadvantaged and under-represented groups entering in HE. In particular, the strategy recommended raising awareness of vocational routes to and through HE and the removal of artificial barriers between FE and HE provision.

2.11 In order to stimulate innovative and additional widening access activities the Welsh Assembly Government, amongst other actions, provided funding for working with communities with a history of under-representation in higher education (Communities First wards, black and ethnic minority communities, disabled students and Welsh speakers). HEFCW increased funding for widening access and supported the establishment of a credit-based qualifications system to increase the potential for credit to be awarded to units in flexible learning programmes. An important and distinctive aspect of the Welsh approach was the all-age aspect for widening access priorities and targets. In England, the comparable Aimhigher initiative was focused on the 18-30 age group.

2.12 Since *Reaching Higher* was published (2002), the Welsh Assembly Government has established a number of significant strategic developments including *One Wales, Making the Connections*, *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*; *Wales a Vibrant Economy*; *Skills That Work for Wales and its associated Action Plan*; *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*; and *A New Approach to Adult Community Learning (ACL)*. These documents provided policy and direction on education that included: developing and enhancing 14-19 learning pathways; strengthening initial teacher training (ITT) provision; addressing skills needs and the regional reconfiguration of education and training; developing a strategy for adult and community learning; and increasing support for Welsh language provision. With regard to higher education, these policies recognised the importance of improving retention, enhancing the employability of graduates, increasing Welsh medium provision and the promotion of reconfiguration and collaboration between Welsh HEIs. Further guidance and direction on these strategic developments was given by the Welsh Assembly Government in its annual remit letters to HEFCW from 2006 to 2009.

2.13 In 2001, prior to the *Reaching Higher* strategy, HEFCW invited institutions to submit widening access strategies and in a 2002 circular (W02/40HE) introduced funding for the strategies based on a three year cycle

together with a Disability Statement. HEFCW provided funding for general implementation of widening access strategies (widening access strategy funding) and, in addition, specific funding to HEIs under two major categories:

- widening access premium funding to support students from non-traditional backgrounds;
- disabled students funding.

2.14 To date, two cycles of widening access strategies have been rolled out: for 2002/03 to 2004/05 (extended to 2005/06) and 2006/07 to 2008/09 extended to 2009/10. The funding allocations were modified in the later cycle of widening access strategies with additional premium funding to support further students from Communities First areas and to work with students identified as 'hard to retain'. It should also be noted that other sources of HEFCW funding such as the core grant, part-time student funding and flexible fee income are also used by HEIs to support widening access.

2.15 To specifically support the widening access agenda, and to recognise the importance of the reconfiguration and collaboration focus in the *Reaching Higher* strategy, HEFCW, in consultation with the sector, established the Reaching Wider initiative in 2002/03 with an additional £2M of Welsh Assembly Government funding set aside for innovative community based schemes'. The Reaching Wider initiative adopted an all age approach and four major target groups were identified: people of all ages in Communities First wards, disabled students, Welsh speakers and ethnic minority groups. Four regional Partnerships were established: North Wales; West & Mid Wales; South West Wales and South East Wales (First Campus). The Partnerships were managed by a lead HEI and included senior representatives from other HEIs, further education colleges, schools, community and voluntary organisations, local education authorities and national agencies such as Careers Wales. Allocations of approximately £2m each year have been made from 2003/04 to the present time and the latest RW proposals cover the period 2008/09 to 2009/10. The Welsh Assembly Government has confirmed Reaching Wider funding to 2010/11.

2.16 Since the development of widening access strategies and the Reaching Wider Partnerships, institutions have also been required to promote disability and equality in accordance with the Disability Discrimination (amendment) Act 2005 and to publish a Disability Equality Scheme.

3. Welsh Assembly Government priorities for widening access to higher education

3.10 The Welsh Assembly Government in *Reaching Higher* set some key targets for the HE sector which included:

- 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. (*At 12% in 06/07 for Welsh HEIs and 9.9% for all UK HEIs in 05/06*);
- the proportion of Welsh domiciled HE students in Welsh HEIs and FEIs undertaking some element of their course through the medium of Welsh to increase from 5.3% in 2000/01 to 7% in 2010/11. (*At 5.1% in 06/07*).

3.11 The Welsh Assembly Government targets and the available statistics (see brackets above) for new entrants acknowledged that there would be slow incremental growth in students from under-represented groups into HE. This mirrored progress elsewhere in the UK and recognised that widening access to HE was a long-term agenda with no 'quick fixes'.

3.12 It is of note that, historically, the Welsh HE sector has been the most successful in the UK with regard to participation from under-represented groups (see Table 1). HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) statistics available from 2002/03 to 2006/07 showed the Welsh HE sector had consistently higher participation rates for entrants from:

- state schools and colleges;
- NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 and 7;
- low participation neighbourhoods;
- mature backgrounds;
- disabled community.

Table 1 Progress by Welsh institutions on widening access indicators for undergraduate entrants						
	2002/03	2002/03	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Percentage of young full-time first degree entrants from state schools						
Wales	91.9	91.5	91.2	91.8	93.1	93.4
England	86.4	86.1	85.9	86.9	87.2	87.4
Scotland	87.5	85.9	86.3	85.7	86.6	86.4
Total UK	87.2	86.8	86.7	97.4	87.8	88.0
Percentage of young full-time first degree entrants from NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6 & 7						
Wales	29.8	29.5	28.4	29.0	30.1	30.4
England	27.9	28.2	27.9	29.1	29.8	29.4
Scotland	28.0	26.9	26.7	27.3	25.9	26.3
Total UK	28.4	28.6	28.2	29.3	29.8	29.5
Percentage of young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (*POLAR2 method from 06/07 on)						
Wales	16.0	16.7	16.8	16.4	10.2*	9.4*
England	12.5	13.3	13.1	13.5	9.6*	9.9*
Scotland	18.6	18.3	18.6	18.6	3.2*	n/a
Total UK	13.3	13.9	13.7	14.0	9.0*	9.7*
Percentage of mature full-time first degree entrants with no previous HE & from low participation background						
Wales	18.3	18.8	20.8	20.9	12.5*	n/a
England	13.8	13.2	14.9	15.2	11.4*	n/a
Scotland	11.4	14.4	12.8	16.2	2.5*	n/a
Total UK	13.8	14.5	14.9	15.6	10.6*	n/a
Percentage of full-time first degree students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance						
Wales	4.0	4.4	4.7	5.2	5.4	n/a
England	2.6	3.1	3.7	4.1	4.4	n/a
Scotland	2.2	2.5	3.1	3.4	3.6	n/a
Total UK	2.6	3.1	3.6	4.1	4.4	n/a
Percentage of Welsh domiciled entrants from Communities First areas						
Welsh HEIs	11.8	11.5	11.6	11.5	12.0	n/a
<i>Welsh Assembly Government priority: to rise from 8.9% in 2000/01 to 11.4 in 2010/11</i>						
Percentage of Welsh domiciled entrants with an element of Welsh medium in their course						
Welsh HEIs	4.8	4.9	4.6	4.9	5.1	n/a
<i>Welsh Assembly Government priority: to increase from 5.3% in 2000/01 to 7.0% in 2010/11</i>						

3.13 Although not initially specified as a *Reaching Higher* priority, in 2006, the then Welsh Assembly Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, in her remit letter to HEFCW, indicated the need to address the 'circumstances of young people entering HE having been in care'. Since that time, institutions have been strongly recommended by HEFCW to follow the recommendations of the Frank Buttle Trust published in *Going to University from Care*, and to achieve the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education. The sector response to this recommendation has been swift and, at the time of writing, the majority of Welsh HEIs have obtained the quality mark with the remaining Welsh HEIs confirming their intention to do so within the next academic year (2009/10).

4. Context for widening access in Wales

4.1 Current and future socio-economic factors in Wales

4.10 The Learning & Skills Observatory Wales website (March 2009) reported the current population of Wales at 2.96M and projected a rise to 3.17M (with a 1.9M working population) by 2020. The Observatory estimated that 73% of the Welsh workforce had left compulsory education and about 26% of the population had a level 4 or above qualification. Around 76% of year 11 pupils progressed to full-time education in 2006 and NEETS (not in employment, education or training) made up 10-12% of 16-18 year olds. Around one in four jobs were in the public sector and over 50% of workers were employed in health, education, public administration, retail and the leisure sectors. South East and South West Wales had the largest concentration of Communities First wards and, on various economic measures, Wales was one of the poorer EU nations.

4.11 Population projections suggest that UK higher education is facing a significant demographic decline in 18-20 year old students. A report, in December 2008, from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) indicated a shortfall of 35,000 'traditional-age' students in UK by 2020. This represented a fall of 4.6% of full-time 'traditional' undergraduates with a slightly higher projection of a 4.9% fall in Wales. However, the report also suggested a significant increase of 12% (about 500,000) in full-time undergraduates in the 25-29 year age range in the UK in the same period. The HEPI report predicted stiffer competition for younger age students among the countries of the UK as the demographic downturn intensified in the next decade.

4.12 Following the Rees review, in 2005, of deferred flexible fees for students in Wales the Welsh Assembly Government placed Wales in a favourable position by announcing that from 2007/08 Welsh students studying in Wales would receive a tuition fee grant of £1890 to offset against fees of £3070. In addition, there was a bursary of £305 for any student receiving a Welsh Assembly learning grant of £2835. At the time of writing, about a third of Welsh domiciled students received a Welsh Assembly learning grant, however, changes in student financing are currently in train that could see improved funding to this group (see paragraph 4.24).

4.13 Since the HEPI report, however, there has been the very significant downturn in the economy and this appears to be having an impact on applications that is not factored into the HEPI analysis. In January 2009, provisional UCAS data to that date showed a 7.8% UK annual rise in full-time undergraduate applicants for entry in 2009 with the most significant increases in older age groups: 12.9% for 21-24 year olds; 12.6% for those 25 and over. In terms of actual entry to HE institutions, statistics produced by UCAS for 2008 showed a 10.4% annual increase in full-time undergraduate acceptances across the UK, again with a very significant increase of 21.7% for the 25 and over age group. Taking into account only Welsh domiciled students, the annual increase in 2008 for all acceptances was 7.1% with a

16.3% increase for 21-24 year olds and a 9.3% increase for the 25 and over age group.

4.2 *Other contextual information: policies and priorities*

4.20 In recent years, there have been a number of influential reports for higher and further education in Wales and across the UK. The England-focused review of skills by Lord Leitch in 2006 *Prosperity For All In The Global Economy - World Class Skills* noted that 70% of the 2020 UK workforce was already in employment and that workplace training and education would assume greater importance. The report noted that in 2005 about 29% of the UK workforce was educated to at least level 4 and that this needed to rise to 40% by 2020 if the UK was to remain competitive in a globalised market. The report supported vocational training that was demand-led by employers with additional funding going to Sector Skills Council consortia to meet this demand. It did not provide a very encouraging picture for traditional full-time engagement with higher education. It should be noted that the report did not take account of the subsequent economic downturn and its implication for higher education and employers.

4.21 In Wales, the 2007 report by Sir Adrian Webb: *Promise and Performance: The Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales in the Context of the Learning Country: Vision into Action* also stressed the importance of vocational education and progression pathways for 14-19 year olds into further education. It noted the need for increased provision of work-based learning in collaboration with employers. Surprisingly, in the light of the Welsh Assembly Government request in *Reaching Higher* to remove barriers between FE and HE, the report had very little to say about progression through FE into HE.

4.22 In relation to part-time students, the Graham review, produced a report in 2006 on *Part-time higher education study in Wales* which drew on some of the conclusions of the Rees review in 2005. The Graham review recommended better funding of part-time learning through the provision of bursaries and scholarships for part-time students, including employees in small and medium sized enterprises.

4.23 In July 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government, taking note of the Leitch and Webb reviews, published *Skills That Work for Wales* and its associated *Action Plan* and this was followed by further policy proposals set out in *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*. The key elements in these documents included the following:

- reviewing *Reaching Higher*;
- seeking advice from Sector Skills Councils on high-level skills;
- extending the delivery of foundation degrees;
- requiring collaborative work through 14-19 networks between HEIs, FEIs and work-based learning providers to develop further progression routes and expand local opportunities;
- establishing clear entry and exit points for post-18 learners.

4.24 In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government established an HE Task and Finish Group, with Professor Merfyn Jones as chair, to review the future of higher education in Wales. Phase 1 of the group's work on student funding was completed in late 2008 and, as a result, in November 2008 the Welsh Assembly Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills indicated the intention to phase out the tuition fee grant in its present form by 2010 to all Welsh students who study in Wales. It was also proposed that a '*significant proportion*' of student financial support would be redirected to help students from low-income families through increased availability of learning grants from 2010/11.

4.25 In the recent past, the Welsh HE sector has also benefited from considerable funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to support widening access initiatives and activities in designated socially deprived areas. Welsh Assembly Government sources indicated that this may have amounted to around £16M for the period 2002-06. However, it is difficult to be more precise with these estimates as Welsh HEIs received ESF funding directly and may have also received funding as part of wider consortium bids led by other organisations. At the same time the FE sector received around £22 million for widening access-related activities. The sustainability of provision, given the ending of this source of funding, has been a serious cause for concern among a number of institutions. At present, some institutions are in the process of seeking support through the EU Convergence Fund. However, the transition time lag between these funding streams has proved extremely challenging. Furthermore, the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning and Skills in a letter to HEFCW (17 April 2009) did not include widening access as one of the priority areas for further European funding support.

4.26 All the above should now be seen in the context of the very demanding economic situation caused by the onset of a recession in 2008/09. Funding for higher education in Wales, and indeed across the UK, is likely to be tight with the possibility of cuts to funding as public spending is reduced in real, and probably actual, terms. In the 2009-10 remit letter to HEFCW from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning and Skills the budget allocations were subject to the following qualifying statement:

'Please note all the above figures are provisional, and are subject to change in-year...'

4.27 Added to this were indications from the Westminster government that there would not be government-funded growth in student numbers in England, despite the expected significant upturn in applications as the recession continued. This will lead to HEIs having to make very difficult decisions and, in a situation of restricted spending, continued investment and support for widening access will require a sound business case.

4.28 Finally, a very important aspect of higher education in Wales has been the generally high level of overall satisfaction of students. In the 2008 National

Student Survey (NSS) five Welsh HEIs were in the top 50 institutions for overall student satisfaction. More recently, the Times Higher Education student satisfaction survey reported, in January 2009, that four Welsh institutions were in the top 20 UK institutions. Those institutions with a strong widening access mission generally had lower overall student satisfaction (75-80% range) in the NSS, nevertheless, they showed year on year improvement in overall student satisfaction. This high level of student satisfaction, attesting to the high quality of provision and support, could be a crucial 'selling point' in persuading potential students to enter higher education in Wales.

5. The role of HEFCW

5.10 Since *Reaching Higher* was established in 2002, HEFCW has been tasked with supporting the delivery of the Assembly's priorities for widening access. These priorities have been set out annually in HEFCW's remit letter and HEFCW has addressed the priorities through the allocation of directed funding for widening access. In addition, it has appointed officers to support widening access and disability policy implementation and, until recently, it had a Widening Access Committee and a Reaching Wider Advisory Sub Group. During the period under review (2006-2009), HEFCW has published a number of widening access-related circulars (Appendix 2). These circulars served a number of purposes. Firstly, they provided information on widening access and regional Partnership initiatives, for example, on funding allocations to institutions and regional Partnerships, fee waivers, Welsh medium and equality schemes. Secondly, they requested consultation on widening access initiatives and provided feedback on that consultation. Lastly, they provided guidance on the reporting and monitoring of widening access activity and requested reports and plans from institutions and regional Partnerships on approaches to widening access. HEFCW also commissioned the review by Arad Consulting in 2006/07 and the current review by the Higher Education Academy in 2008/09.

5.11 This focus on widening access policy development and implementation constitutes clear evidence that HEFCW has invested considerable resource in supporting the HE sector to achieve the priorities set out by the Welsh Assembly Government. There has been regular consultation with the sector about initiatives and funding allocations and, overall, HEFCW has been thorough in its promotion of the widening access agenda in Wales.

5.12 The one major area where further progress is needed is in the evaluation of the impact of the widening access activities. This issue has presented significant challenges for widening access initiatives across the UK. The need for improved impact assessment is acknowledged by HEFCW and by institutions in their responses to the Arad evaluation reports. This issue will be returned to later in this review. One recent change in HEFCW's management of widening access was the merging of the Widening Access Committee into the newly-constituted Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee from 2009. This new committee will have an approach that addresses issues around the whole student life-cycle (e.g. learning and teaching, quality enhancement, retention, progression and widening access) and it provides an opportunity to place and promote widening access within a broader context and to see it as part of 'mainstream' business.

6. Institutional approaches to widening access

6.1 General scope, structure and content of widening access strategies

6.10 The widening access strategies submitted by institutions were comprehensive documents and commonly of considerable length containing both strategic and operational detail. Guidance provided by HEFCW on the submission of strategies for 2006/07 to 2008/09 had a limited number of requests for specific information (see Table 2) and this allowed institutions to develop their strategies according to their missions.

6.11 Generally, it was the requirement to provide detail on short term targets and financial accounting that resulted in lengthy strategic documents. Institutions presented strategies with many pages devoted to accounting for funding accompanied by numerous tables with targets, activities and related data. Given this focus on operational detail, while the strategies were clearly of value to staff directly engaged with widening access activities on a day to day basis, their length and level of detail might deter senior managers and non-specialist staff attempting to engage with the strategic ambitions of widening access.

Table 2 – Key points from HEFCW guidance for widening access strategies 2006/09- (Circular 06/27HE):

- provide a progress report on use of funding in 2005/06;
- outline the relationship of widening access to institutional missions and other institutional strategies and plans;
- outline approaches to equal opportunities with regard to disability and race;
- indicate the development of Welsh medium activity;
- indicate approaches to student retention;
- outline financial planning and the use of widening access funding;
- address Assembly Government *Reaching Higher* priorities: Communities First areas; Welsh speakers; the inclusion of black and other ethnic minority communities and disabled people;
- provide short, medium and long term strategies and short term targets to confirm the use of funding;
- provide information on the management, monitoring and evaluation of widening access activities;
- consider recommendations from the Frank Buttle Trust report *Going to University from Care*.

6.12 In accordance with the parameters listed above, most of the strategies sought to indicate compliance with national policy for higher education along with charting a developmental approach to widening access. A common feature of a developmental approach was linkage of widening access policy

and practice to key aspects of an institution's mission and academic priorities. Such priorities included the promotion of STEM subjects, vocational and lifelong learning, part-time and other flexible learning developments, graduate employment and postgraduate provision, Welsh language and medium subject developments, and workforce development within a regional context. Although most institutional strategies demonstrated a developmental approach, reporting tended to focus on compliance which mainly took the form of accounting for funding.

6.13 The length of the written strategies made it difficult for those external to the institution to fully appreciate the strategic ambition and direction of widening access work. As shown later in this review, and in relation to this point, a lack of measurable outcomes also suggested that institutions may not have been getting full credit for their investment and achievement.

6.14 Compared to the approach in England, the consistent requirement for Welsh institutions to submit widening access strategies and annual reports should be seen as giving Wales an advantage as this approach has provided continuity of thinking for institutions and HEFCW. As a result of recent developments in England, institutions there are now required to prepare three-year Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSAs) (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_01/). While this might be viewed as the re-introduction of widening participation (WP) strategies, the new WPSAs have a number of distinctive features, which might be beneficially applied in the Welsh HE sector.

6.15 Firstly, WPSAs require a strategic as opposed to operational focus on widening participation within institutions. The intention is for a relatively short document locating widening participation within the institutional context, demonstrating the institution's commitment to widening participation, setting out its aims and key objectives, appropriate targets and milestones for the future and identifying investment in widening participation. In addition, institutions should append their access agreement, high level admissions policy and other supporting information. This is likely to include key policy documents and could include an operational plan for those directly engaged in the delivery or management of widening participation activity within the institution.

6.16 Secondly, WPSAs are intended to integrate developmental work, reporting procedures and public relations functions in order to improve the promotion of the widening participation work institutions are undertaking. The developmental approach should encourage institutions to reveal the realities of their experiences with regard to widening participation and facilitate dialogue between the institution and HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England). This can be viewed as a positive approach as many institutions would welcome specific feedback about their approach to widening participation. However, there could be a tension between the developmental dialogue and the accountability function which requires institutions to demonstrate that they are making good progress towards their targets.

6.17 Thirdly, WPSAs are based on a student lifecycle approach. The WPSAs incorporate access agreements and financial support for students, admissions policies and fair access, inclusive learning, teaching and assessment, student retention and success. This in turn requires a whole institution approach to widening participation, linking together institutional policies and practices, and promoting an inclusive culture. Institutions are encouraged to append related policies and plans to their WPSA to illustrate this lifecycle approach. There is however no specific need for student engagement in widening participation policy development.

6.18 Apart from access agreements, many of the aspects listed above are already present in Welsh institutions' widening access strategies. If all of these aspects could also be brought together, in an integrated fashion and within a short strategic statement the potential use of the Welsh widening access strategies could be considerably enhanced.

6.2 Links to other institutional strategies and institutional strategic aims

6.20 All the Welsh strategies commented on links with other institutional strategies. In particular there were references to coherence with institution's general mission and strategic plans and also with the learning and teaching strategies. For five institutions serving large urban communities with areas of under-representation in HE, widening access was a key element of the institutional mission. For institutions with a stronger research portfolio there was usually linkage to the Third Mission strategy (e.g. applied research, innovation, enterprise) and a focus on widening access to STEM subjects and postgraduate study. The other major linkage referred to in a majority of strategies was with retention policies or strategies. One institution highlighted this linkage by presenting a *Widening Access and Retention Strategy*, though the retention element might have been more fully developed.

6.3 Leadership, embedding and cultural change

6.30 Welsh widening access strategies indicated that leadership for widening access was generally the responsibility of a member of the senior management team and this accorded with the high profile given to widening access in institutional missions and strategic plans. In the majority of institutions, the senior manager was usually a Pro Vice Chancellor, though in two institutions it was the Head of a unit or department with a major role in widening access. Further leadership and decision-making was provided through institutional groups with titles such as widening access/participation committee, widening participation and social inclusion task group, disability support group or the learning development group. Implementation of the widening access strategy and, in some cases, Reaching Wider Partnership work was commonly co-ordinated through an administrative office, unit or department with officers appointed using joint WA/RW or solely RW funding. The core teams in these units usually had staff dedicated to either internal widening access schemes or liaison roles for regional Partnerships. In some institutions staff appointed to disability roles were also attached to these administrative units.

6.31 In the Higher Education Academy's UK-wide programme to develop and embed inclusive policy and practice, the commitment and engagement of senior managers was identified as significant in bringing about the cultural change required by the agendas of equality and diversity and widening access. It was clear that senior managers had a leadership role in the agenda, demonstrated by ensuring that there was:

- a shared vision for equality and participation across the institution;
- sufficient resource available;
- a strategic link between different institutional functions and services;
- celebration and reward of achievement in this area;
- approval of strategic change;
- 'buy in' from other staff (including the Board of Governors).

In some institutions, senior staff were seen as advocates and champions for the changes being taken forward and they provided a role model for approaches towards widening access.

6.32 Although not explicitly stated in most of the strategies, widening access was contributing to institutions' work on supporting students from a range of backgrounds and with diverse learning needs. This process of cultural change appeared to be in progress at many institutions. The principal way of achieving this in some institutions was by ensuring that a centre dedicated to widening access supported and promoted activities. Such centres provided: institution-wide planning and co-ordination; management and distribution of funding; and training and staff development. For a number of institutions, the last was seen as a key factor in achieving cultural change and one institution had created a high visibility 'in reach' staff development and learning scheme to inform its staff about widening access-related issues. This included, for example, staff development that provided guidance on specific teaching and learning approaches for use with community-based and access-focused study programmes.

6.33 While widening access strategies made frequent reference to central administrative units (e.g. registry) devolving central funding to support activities in academic departments, it appeared unusual for institutions to have an academic department take a leading role. Just one institution had most of its widening access work based within an academic continuing education department. Generally strategies did not give a clear indication of whether, and to what extent, management and responsibility for widening access activity was devolved into academic units though there was common mention of activities such as mentoring and personal tutoring of students within departments.

6.4 *Target groups*

6.40 Widening access target groups identified by institutions accorded with Welsh Assembly Government policy: Communities First wards, young people and adults, black and other minority ethnic groups, disabled people, Welsh

speakers and more recently, though not a *Reaching Higher target group*, young people from care. The widening access strategies predated the Webb and *Skills That Work for Wales* reports so, generally, there was little or no reference to a key message from those reports: vocational learning for adults in work. However, in developing this work further in future, it should be noted that the establishment of the Welsh Credit and Qualifications Framework provides a structure for HE institutions to offer flexible, credit-based workplace learning opportunities.

6.41 Taking into account institutional missions and purposes, widening access strategies commonly highlighted widening access issues relating to the key groups identified by the Welsh Assembly Government. For instance, three institutions in predominantly Welsh-speaking parts of the country saw a significant role for the Welsh language in widening access. Whereas, for five HE institutions in more urban areas there was a greater focus on the widening access needs within the local communities in deprived areas. A feature of working with the community was the all age approach with institutions engaging with, for example, schools and pupils, adults and families. There are instances where the community-based work of an HE institution is supported by the Reaching Wider initiative (see section 9 for further detail). For example, one Reaching Wider Partnership appointed a family learning co-ordinator and an all age adviser. Other initiatives included a community-based art club for adults, support of Adult Learners' Week (part of the UK-wide National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) programme) and family-focused university taster courses. In this last respect institutions were working to fulfil a Welsh Assembly Government aspiration to promote intergenerational study as a means of capacity building in communities.

6.42 At the time of writing, the Welsh Assembly Government is establishing Adult Community Learning (<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills> - search using Adult Community Learning). The ACL regional partnerships will have representation from local authorities, FE institutions and voluntary organisations amongst others. This network will offer HE institutions, either individually or through the Reaching Wider Partnerships, the opportunity to develop further links with adult learners and integrate existing provision. In this context, the long experience of the Open University in Wales will be valuable and there are considerable advantages for widening access in all institutions having closer links with the Open University in Wales. In addition, this agenda will call for closer working with Niace Dysgu Cymru (<http://niace.rcthosting.com/en/default.asp>), sector skills councils and other employer organisations and agencies.

6.43 All widening access strategies listed ethnic minority groups as a target but rarely gave any specific detail on the range and number of different ethnic minorities they work with or the requirement and resources necessary to deliver different approaches to engaging with these communities. A couple of strategies referred to provision for refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and Romany gypsies. The assumption appeared to be that ethnic minorities would make up a proportion of participants on widening access programmes and there was commonly a stated commitment to ensuring that this proportion

reflected the fraction of the regional population made up of ethnic minority groups. Some strategies were accompanied by data that generally showed institutions slightly exceeding their targets for BME (black and minority ethnic) students as a whole. However, strategies did not propose drilling down into minority ethnic student data to examine whether some minority groups were over- or under-represented in HE institutions or subject areas. Additionally, some of the WA strategies which made very brief reference to BME groups indicated that there was other documentation on race and equality underpinning their WA work in this area. In terms of overall, undifferentiated BME numbers, it would appear that institutions were meeting their commitment to recruit BME students to a level that more than reflects the proportion of BME citizens in Wales.

6.44 Research conducted by the Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) for the former Department of Universities, Innovation and Skills (DIUS) (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/ethnicity>) focused on the more challenging problem of differential degree achievement by BME students in England. In the light of this research it would be appropriate for Welsh institutions to consider not just the access to higher education but also to monitor the retention and achievement of those students by different BME groups. In Wales though there may be issues associated with data protection given the small numbers of BME students studying in Wales.

6.45 With regard to target groups within the disabled student population, the widening access strategies were more explicit. There was commonly an indication of approaches to providing support for physical disability, mental disability and dyslexia. A fuller analysis of institutional approaches to disability is given in section 7.

6.46 In England, there is a non-prescriptive approach to defining widening participation, to take account of institutional diversity and mission-specificity. HEFCE have provided targeting guidance (HEFCE circular 2007/12), and while Aimhigher partnerships are required to use these, institutions are encouraged to adopt them too. Work by the Higher Education Academy with institutional staff in England suggests that there might be a need for greater clarity about the scope of widening participation within each institution and the implications for institutional policies, practices and culture.

6.5 *Retention and student-centred support*

6.50 In Wales, widening access strategies showed that, regardless of non-continuation rates, HE institutions were working to improve student support and retention. For non-traditional students, all the HEIs in Wales were moving towards providing strong longitudinal support centred on student need throughout their time in higher education. HEIs saw the early weeks in an institution as critical to the retention of students, especially those from diverse backgrounds. At one institution, a retention scheme using experienced student mentors to support targeted group of students had been so successful that it had been extended to cover all students in the institution. In another institution, its centre for lifelong learning was developing a continuum of

support that stretched from outreach provision through entry and induction to graduation. The institution also had faculty advice centres providing some of the support. Research by a teaching fellow at another institution into an e-learning foundation programme with a poor retention rate resulted in a dramatic improvement when a personalised learning approach to the virtual learning environment was adopted. A number of other institutions also saw the development of personalised learning as vital to the success of programmes relying heavily on virtual or distance learning. Other retention-related initiatives highlighted in the widening access strategies included:

- support through a website for students from non-traditional backgrounds;
- the regular monitoring and tracking of students deemed at risk;
- the introduction of a diary room as part of the induction programme;
- one-on-one mentoring for students entering through widening access routes;
- the appointment of student retention advisers;
- the introduction of a fresher 'buddy' scheme;
- a review of support provided through a personal tutoring scheme.

The Higher Education Academy has recently published 'First year student experience Wales. A practice guide' detailing initiatives supporting the first year student experience in HEIs in Wales

6.51 In England, the term 'widening participation' (WP) has usually been used to mean the dual approach of widening access and promoting student success in higher education. The use of the term 'widening access' in Wales also reflects this broader notion of pre-HE stage of raising educational aspirations and skills, together with support to enable enrolled students to succeed in HE and beyond. However, it is interesting to note that the widening access strategies in Wales are more strongly biased towards pre-entry access as opposed to a broader remit which encompasses broader notions of student participation, success and graduate progression.

6.52 The focus on student retention and success in England is illustrated by the allocation by HEFCE of core funding for student retention. An interesting development, and one in keeping with the student life-cycle concept, is that retention funding is no longer allocated as part of the WP premium, but rather within an institution's overall teaching grant. This shifts the emphasis away from poor retention being solely a widening participation problem, and recognises the centrality of the learning experience in improving retention. The trend for widening access and student retention and success to be connected is captured in the development of Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSA), although institutions are not currently asked to address differential achievement between equality groups. In addition, HEFCE and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation have co-funded a £1 million programme to research and evaluate strategies and interventions to improve

student retention and success (see http://www.actiononaccess.org/index.php?p=11_3).

6.53 It might be advantageous for Welsh institutions to consider analysing institutional equality, progression and achievement data and to utilise the data analysis outcomes to target work with groups of students who have lower than expected rates of retention, progression and achievement.

6.6 *Welsh medium*

6.60 Increasing and enhancing the number of students undertaking Welsh medium study was a *Reaching Higher* widening access target: as students studying through the medium of Welsh were under-represented in higher education. Data on the *Reaching Higher* target for Welsh medium students revealed a small percentage increase in Welsh speakers (9.4% in 2006/07) with the percentage of Welsh-domiciled HE students taking an element of their course in Welsh remaining between 4.6% and 5.1% between 2001/02 and 2006/07 (see also Table 1).

6.61 In recognition of the ambitious targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government and the relative lack of an all-Wales planning strategy for Welsh medium provision in the past, Welsh HEIs established a national strategy and framework for achieving a step-change in terms of progress. Since 2007, this has been led by a Welsh Medium Higher Education Sector Group. Work has been taken forward by a range of sub-groups and subject panels on a sector-wide basis and facilitated by a sector-owned Centre for Welsh medium in HE (CWMHE). All Welsh HEIs, encompassing both the traditional contributors of Welsh medium provision and those where the level of provision has hitherto been lower, are involved in this work. Currently, the Welsh Assembly Government is also formulating a new Welsh Language Education Strategy and has considered the establishment of the Coleg Ffederal.

6.62 Within a number of institutions there were units providing services to support Welsh medium teaching and learning. A key issue for the expansion of Welsh medium study has involved staff development with, historically, an insufficient number of bilingual academics. This was being addressed through the research scholarship and teaching fellowship schemes administered by the CWMHE. Other work being taken forward included marketing and promotional work focussing on the 'Mantais' brand, undertaken, where appropriate, in liaison with Reaching Wider Partnerships, and an increased investment in project funding to develop more resources for students.

6.63 There are clearly links to be made and developed further between the aspiration-raising and support for Welsh speakers as part of Reaching Wider and widening access activities and the broader efforts of the sector to increase demand for, and participation in, Welsh medium HE.

7. Institutional approaches to disability, equality and diversity

7.1 Strategic requirements

7.10 Traditionally, students identified as disabled or coming from particular ethnic background (e.g. black and minority ethnic) have been viewed within the widening access agenda as under-represented groups. The policy context since the time of writing widening access strategies has significantly changed with the advent of a duty on institutions to promote disability, racial and gender equality and publish an equality scheme for each of these areas. Further changes were anticipated in the light of the Equality Bill introduced to the House of Commons on 24 April 2009, with a proposal that institutions be required to respond to a single duty covering a range of protected characteristics and for local authorities to be required to regard how their decisions might help reduce inequalities associated with socio-economic status.

7.11 The HEFCW 2006 circular (W06/05HE) on the submission of WA strategies referred to providing equal opportunities for disabled students and there was a request for institutions to submit their Disability Development Plans (DDP) along with the widening access strategy. It was left to the individual institutions to decide whether to integrate their disability plans within the WA strategy or to provide a separate DDP. Consequently, the inclusion of disability-related strategy development within widening access strategies is quite variable. For one institution, disability was a prominent, almost dominant, feature of the widening access strategy. For a couple of other institutions the strategy barely mentioned disability and, the Academy review team assumed that this was because it was dealt with in other policy documentation. The other eight institutions had strategies that dealt with disability somewhere between these two examples. Unsurprisingly, there was always a strong element of compliance around the approach to disability with common reference to legislative requirements such as SENDA (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) and the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act 2005). A feature of the widening access strategies was the use of language that did not fully reflect a social inclusion model, for example, through reference to the needs of disabled students rather than their right to entitlement in equal measure with other students.

7.12 Given the strategic documentation available for this review, it was not possible to gauge the extent of HE institutions' intention to achieve organisational cultural change relating to equality and including disabled students' entitlements. However, at a more operational level, strategies clearly indicated the provision of services for disabled students and use of the Disabled Students Premium and there was common reference to disability

support units and groups within institutions. Other notable developments included extending one institution's specialist centre support for blind students to other institutions. However, the strategies could have been enhanced by taking the opportunity to set out a strategic vision of promoting cultural change across an institution in the approach to supporting disabled students. It is possibly the case that the planning for cultural change was captured in other policy documentation such as Disability Development Plans and Disability Equality Schemes (DES), however, the widening access strategies gave little or no detail on interfacing with an institution's DDP and DES.

7.13 There is undoubtedly a real opportunity to address disability and other equalities alongside widening access as these agendas are mutually reinforcing and aligned. Both require a systematic and holistic approach to addressing social inclusion. It might be more beneficial to HE institutions and students if these two areas were not addressed separately.

7.14 Institutions have a responsibility under the equality legislation to promote equality, prohibit discrimination and harassment, and ensure full and equal participation of all equality groups in learning and public life. It further requires that adjustments are made for disabled people to enable this to happen. An underpinning principle of the equality duties is a focus on changing the attitudes, systems and practices that could be discriminatory, create barriers and/or prevent full participation of all equality groups. The duties apply to all staff (both teaching and non-teaching roles) and reinforce a shared responsibility and accountability for equality and diversity. The widening access strategies could be usefully developed to include plans to engage all staff in the promotion of equality and access to achieve cultural change (see also paragraph 7.23).

7.15 The equalities legislation required institutions to gather and use equality data as part of their equality schemes. Within the widening access strategies it was not possible to judge the extent to which institutions were gathering and using data to monitor progress and inform their plans. In order to provide a baseline for measuring progress within Wales there is a need for HEIs to use available common data (e.g. from HESA) on equality and diversity, as well as access.

7.2 Whole institutional and proactive approach

7.20 There are several core requirements associated with the equality and diversity legislation which could be embedded within related institutional strategy documentation. These core elements include:

- a whole institutional approach;
- clear leadership on equality-related issues;
- the involvement of disabled people;
- the gathering and use of information; and
- monitoring, reviewing and reporting on progress.

These areas are expanded on in the following paragraphs.

7.21 The equality legislation encourages institutions to take a whole institutional approach and to work towards the development of an inclusive culture. This is a shared responsibility amongst all staff and students, and requires the involvement of the whole organisation. Individual staff, therefore, should take steps to be proactive in their approach and consider the entitlements of prospective, current and previous students in their plans, activities and procedures. These considerations should be made without the need to categorise individuals by equality groupings (i.e. irrespective of someone being known to or disclosing a disability).

7.22 The associated duties apply to all institutional functions. There should be a holistic approach throughout the organisation to achieving cultural change. A number of institutional functions are associated with widening access, including marketing, admissions, induction, services, estates, partnership working, teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum, staff development, fieldtrips, visits and social activities. Institutions could usefully use their widening access strategies to demonstrate how they have given due consideration to equality in carrying out these functions.

7.23 In the wider UK context, there are instructive examples of institutions working towards whole organisational change with respect to disability, equality and widening access. In order to achieve institution-wide change and ensure the systematic and coherent uptake of inclusive practices across an institution, those on the Higher Education Academy's inclusive policy and practice programme (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/disability/inclusion>) found the need to address both:

- institutional level change: targeting institutional policy, strategy, structures, systems, processes, curriculum, environmental factors, whether centrally or within departments/faculties; and
- individual level change: targeting individual's attitudes, awareness, knowledge, understanding, perceptions and assumptions, as well as practice.

7.24 Senior managers are responsible for ensuring that equality duties are met. The Disability Equality Duty Code of Practice states that '*Change starts at the top. Strong, clear and consistent leadership is the key to achieving change in the public sector*' (DRC 2005, 2.59). The change required to bring about equality is a long term process dependent upon commitment from those responsible for strategic planning and implementation within the institution (see also paragraph 6.31). The Code of Practice advised senior managers to align equality to the institutional strategic priorities, quality and the business developmental plan to ensure a holistic approach is taken throughout the institution (see Understanding the Disability Discrimination Act, DRC 2007).

7.25 At the individual level, embedding widening access and disability equality can be assisted by engaging staff across the institution and by facilitating collaboration between different groups of staff such as between

different support services; between support staff and academic staff; or between departments. A variety of different methods can be used to support and work with individuals across the institution in bringing about the change required. These include the provision of continuing professional development, the engagement of students and champions, changes to individual management processes and promoting dialogue.

7.3 Data collection and use

7.30 Institutions (and particularly senior managers) are required to collect and use information as part of meeting their equality duty. They must specify their arrangements for gathering information in terms of recruitment, retention, achievement and progression. This may include both quantitative and qualitative information and involve gathering information from students on the quality of their experiences and their levels of satisfaction or on the nature of their complaints. Institutions must further show how they are using the information gathered to identify achievements and progress, and importantly to inform priority areas and actions in the promotion of equality.

7.31 With regard to data collection and use, generally, institutional practice differs across the UK. Some institutions employed staff to collect and analyse institutional data, but not necessarily by equality or widening access target groups. The Equality Challenge Unit is currently supporting the development of an equality HEIDI (Higher Education Information Database for Institutions), a data management tool used to store and retrieve institutional data. The updated version will support HE institutions in the analysis of institutional data by equality groups (<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/our-projects/heidi-equality>).

7.32 Anecdotal evidence would suggest that whilst data may be routinely collected and analysed by institutions, the information generated is less often used to inform action. Conversely, actions are not always informed by the data and research available within institutions. In the Higher Education Academy's inclusive policy and practice programme, building an evidence base was found to be an intrinsic part of developing and embedding widening access and equality. Participating institutions drew on both internal and external research throughout the process, and found institutional data acted as a lever for change.

7.4 Student Involvement

7.40 One of the strategic requirements on institutions, as part of the Disability Equality Duty (2006), is to have regard for the involvement of disabled people in the formation and implementation of disability equality schemes. Whilst there has been some sector progress, with students being increasingly involved within institutional processes and practice, there are reported concerns about the need to more meaningfully engage disabled students in the formation of policy and practice. These have been documented by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/involving-disabled-people>). It is noted to be common practice for institutions to conduct surveys or focus groups to

identify disabled students' barriers and experiences. Likewise, it is known that some HE institutions are involving disabled students in conducting equality impact assessments to gauge the impact of plans, policies and procedures on different equality groups. However, it is not common practice for student engagement to be addressed strategically or systematically across the institution, nor is it common for methods of involvement to be regularly reviewed and revised to ensure meaningful and continual engagements with students. Furthermore, in the WPSAs in England, there is not an explicit focus on student involvement in policy development and the assessment of widening participation within institutions. However, research suggests that whilst involving disabled people can present challenges, if it is properly resourced and meaningfully conducted, it can result in significant benefits to all concerned.

7.41 The Higher Education Academy is working with the Equality Challenge Unit and a limited number of HE institutions in England and Wales to further the involvement of disabled students across a range of HE functions. Institutions on the programme are working to increase the representation of students within committee and governance structures as well as creating student-led working groups to take forward developmental work within the institution. A number of institutions are providing training for student representatives, particularly by working in partnership with the student union. The project will ultimately produce a guidance document which will include a range of successful initiatives adopted by HE institutions.

8. Recommendations for higher education institutions

1. Work towards a whole institution approach to widening access, taking account of, equality and diversity, student support, retention and success and progression beyond HE (paragraphs 6.33, 7.13, 7.14, 7.21).
2. Continue to ensure that there is clear senior management leadership, commitment to, and engagement in, this agenda, to continue promote institutional cultural change (paragraph 6.31).
3. Work with all staff to integrate widening access and equality and diversity in all institutional policies, functions and activities, and through strategic collaboration (paragraph 6.33).
4. Systematically collect and monitor data on widening access, equality and student success to identify trends and priorities for intervention and change (paragraphs 6.43, 6.44, 7.15, 7.30, 7.31).
5. Use institutional data, evaluation evidence and equality impact assessments to examine the potential and actual impact of interventions, policy, and practice (paragraphs 5.12, 6.53).
6. Provide sustained opportunities for students (including those from widening access groups) to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes within the institution (paragraph 7.40).

9. Development of Reaching Wider Partnerships

9.1 *The Partnerships*

9.10 With the establishment of the Reaching Wider initiative in 2002/03 all HE institutions became members of four regional partnerships (lead institutions in bold):

- First Campus (South East Wales) – **University of Glamorgan** including the Royal College of Music and Drama, University of Wales Newport, Cardiff University, University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Open University in Wales;
- South West Wales – **Swansea University**, Swansea Metropolitan University, and from 2007/08, Trinity University College Carmarthen;
- West and Mid Wales – **Aberystwyth University**, University of Wales Lampeter, Open University in Wales and until 2006/07 Trinity University College Carmarthen;
- North Wales – **Bangor University**, Glyndŵr University.

9.11 Each Partnership included the FE institutions in the region and for some Partnerships there were partners from local government and pan-Wales agencies (e.g. Careers Wales). Within the Reaching Wider proposals this review found that, generally, there was no more than a listing of the non-HE partners and so it was difficult to gauge the level of their strategic input or to assess the extent and effectiveness of FE and HE strategic collaboration within the RW Partnerships. HEFCW has established Practitioners' Group meetings and annual widening access conferences so there appeared to be opportunities to facilitate a more prominent role for non-HE partners. It was noted that only two of the Reaching Wider Partnerships had the Open University in Wales as a member at strategic steering group level. Given the anticipated HE growth in adult provision, and the Open University's expertise in adult, part-time and other areas, it would seem beneficial for all Partnerships to engage fully with the Open University in Wales.

9.12 Generally, institutions regarded the Partnerships as successfully engaging with the target groups and communities. Two indications of success were the Partnerships' contribution to the increase in new undergraduate entrants from Communities First wards: from 8.9% in 2000/01 to 10.2% in 2004/05; and the increase in students taught through the medium of Welsh from 130,322 in 2005/06 to 132,373 in 2006/07. In addition, the Arad Consulting report of June 2007 (pp 28-57) presented a number of case studies illustrating some of the successes of the RW Partnerships.

9.13 In Reaching Wider proposals, effective linkage between institutional widening access planning and wider regional developments was achieved primarily through senior widening access staff from institutions serving on RW Partnership strategic steering groups. In addition, HEFCW funding for the development of institutional articulation strategies had provided documentary

evidence of effective linkage. This was achieved in a number of ways, including through co-locating staff working on widening access programmes and staff funded through Reaching Wider, sometimes within a dedicated unit (e.g. centre for lifelong learning).

9.14 As indicated above, there have been changes to the Partnerships' membership with Trinity University College Carmarthen moving from the West and Mid Wales Partnership to the South West Wales Partnership. The Arad evaluation recommended a review of the configuration of the Partnerships. Apart from the South East Wales (First Campus) Partnership, the Partnerships serve relatively few Communities First areas and there may be opportunities for more effective use of funding in a reduced number of Partnerships. With the recent and ongoing changes in the Welsh HE sector, as well as Reaching Wider Partnerships, there could be a case for a reduction to three RW Partnerships based in South East Wales, South West Wales and North and Mid Wales. This is perhaps an opportune time for HEFCW to review the configuration of the Partnerships because the Partnerships will have been operating for around 9 years at the end of the current funding period, and Welsh Assembly Government policies and priorities have developed further since the Partnerships were originally established.

9.2 *Partnership activities*

9.20 The activities of the Reaching Wider Partnerships tended to focus on the key groups identified by the Assembly such as children, adults, parents, schools and groups within Communities First wards, Welsh speakers, black and minority ethnic communities including asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers, and disabled people. Amongst other activities, the Partnerships provided: events for school pupils at various age levels which raised awareness and provided an introduction to university life; mentoring schemes for schools and pupils; courses at summer schools; revision sessions for GCSE and collaborative work with local radio. Generally, the majority of the Partnership work has centred on school children or young people but there is increasing attention to families, adults and lifelong learning within communities. An indicative list of activities is presented in Appendix 3. In addition to regional work, there have been a number of pan-Wales activities sponsored by HEFCW. These have included the All Wales *Hands on Science* programme (led by the South East Wales Partnership); the Widening Access Wales BME (WAW) programme (led by the South West Wales Partnership), and the *Mentro Iaith* e-mentoring programme (led by the West and Mid Wales Partnership).

9.21 The Partnership proposals tended to be largely operational documents justifying their short-term funding, as might be expected given the short-term nature of their funding. Nevertheless, these were valuable and constructive documents that set out regional priorities and targets and gave indications of successful initial engagement with target groups identified by the Welsh Assembly Government. As Appendix 3 shows, the Partnerships have generated a considerable range of activity over the years and this has led to the delivery of several hundred events to several thousand participants.

9.3 *Long-term support for prospective students*

9.30 The emphasis in Reaching Wider funded proposals has been on maintaining a set of annually-run activities and events designed to reach a targeted number of participants. Programmes and events have been delivered for specific age groups within schools, however, in most cases they do not set out opportunities for learners to progress through the Reaching Wider activities. In some cases, it has not been easy to understand the strategic coherence between the range of provision offered, particularly in the case of large-scale, 'one-off' activities.

9.31 Where longitudinal widening access support for prospective entrants to HE exists, it has included the development of progression pathways with FE colleges and secondary schools (commonly referred to as 'compact' schools by institutions) and the establishment of pre-entry programmes in HE institutions (e.g. Foundation Studies access programmes). Another approach has been to provide student mentors for secondary school pupils. For example, one HE institution provided student mentors for pupils studying STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) subjects or professional disciplines. Other examples of longer term support included a dedicated centre providing learning time credits (an entitlement to purchase study free of charge) to the community and another institution providing an open programme curriculum allowing participants to develop study programmes to suit their requirements.

9.32 A notable feature in a number of institutional approaches to improving retention and the student learning experience, commonly referred to in their learning and teaching strategies, is the concept of 'personalised learning'. The concept is applied to students registered within an institution and involves, among other things, careful tracking and monitoring of student progress, long-term support for students from tutors and mentors and direction on the use of technology-enhanced learning. It is a concept that could be applied to prospective Reaching Wider students prior to their arrival at an institution. Partnerships could consider reducing the emphasis on providing an extensive range of annual events and programmes and redirecting their focus to a more intensive and personalised approach to supporting students on Reaching Wider programmes and activities. This could involve offering fewer events and programmes and, through targeted programmes, providing learning pathways for individuals to move from schools, colleges and the community into HE institutions. This could be coupled with tracking and monitoring of individual participants using a system such as the Managing Information Across Partners Programme (MIAP) (see 12.33).

9.4 *Approaches to long term support in England*

9.40 In England, Aimhigher partnerships (<http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/>) have been encouraged to move away from one-off projects, towards programmes

of inter-connected activities, which develop and build progression pathways into HE. The aim is to establish longitudinal programmes of activities for young people, which are more planned, integrated, sequential and progressive, and are, therefore, relevant to participants' age/stage and build on their previous widening participation activity. This way of working has been conceptualised as the Higher Education Progression Framework, and is summarised as follows:

'The Higher Education Progression Framework (HEPF) provides a set of principles and characteristics to guide partnerships and institutions in moving beyond 'one-off' WP interventions to a sequence of experiences for learners within a sustained and planned programme' (Action on Access, 2008)

The HEPF (http://www.actiononaccess.org/index.php?p=19_1_2_2) has evolved into a learner journey approach, having developed from a "menu of activities" method of delivery. The former is learner centred and, as far as appropriate, personalised, while the latter reflects an institutional or cohort-led approach. Benefits arising from the HEPF approach are listed in Appendix 4.

9.5 Review and critical audit

9.50 As already stated above, in 2007, widening access and the Reaching Wider Partnerships were reviewed by Arad Consulting and, additionally, the Partnerships have carried out their own internal regional critical audits for HEFCW. The regional audits of Reaching Wider Partnerships in 2008 have provided a largely 'internal' qualitative approach to evaluation. In future, the audits could be strengthened by having a more demonstrable degree of external expert input into the audit and by using a methodology which involves comparative study across Reaching Wider Partnerships and with UK-wide practice and developments. The key challenges for the Partnerships identified during these processes included the need for:

- more systematic tracking and monitoring of students to demonstrate effective interventions and longitudinal support for targeted learners;
- more sharing of good practice;
- more targeting of adults in employment and NEETS;
- reviewing and strengthening of support for people entering HE from a care background;
- reviewing the configuration of Partnerships;
- improving the alignment of HE and FE widening access activities;
- addressing funding shortfalls through application for EU convergence funds.

Some of these challenges are explored further below.

9.51 In response to the regional audit and also the Arad Consulting evaluation, some of the Reaching Wider Partnerships have introduced or improved tracking systems and can now record successes. One Reaching

Wider Partnership has moved in this direction by appointing a tracking and monitoring officer and developing a website to tracking progression.

9.52 The 2008 Reaching Wider Partnership regional audits demonstrated different approaches to provision for adults; two saw the focus remaining largely with young people and two had moved towards greater engagement with adults. The latter involved a broader Partnership approach with links to sector skills councils, Job Centre Plus, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), trades unions, as well as the existing partnership with Careers Wales. With the Welsh Assembly Government establishing a new adult community learning policy (ACL – see also paragraph 6.42) and ACL regional centres, Partnerships will want to ensure effective links with this initiative.

9.53 In England, the Action on Access (<http://www.actiononaccess.org>) programme *Mainstreaming and sustaining WP in institutions* found that a number of institutions were looking to bring together their widening access activity, employer engagement, employee learning and work-based learning. This trend is likely to be reflected more broadly in the institutional WPSAs. Given the mix of members, Reaching Wider Partnerships in Wales are well-placed to adopt a similar approach.

9.6 *Effective Practice and Reaching Wider*

9.60 The Arad Consulting evaluation anticipated that greater consideration would be given to sharing of good practice between the Partnerships. This elicited a mixed response from partners with reluctance to share practice relating to funding, but a readiness to share good practice relating to activities. This ambiguity probably reflected that, in some cases, widening access included issues of competitive advantage, usually where Partnerships' work was too closely linked to student recruitment. In these cases, it was perhaps unlikely that partner HE institutions would support the unfettered sharing of good practice.

9.61 With regard to effective practice at the national level, the Higher Education Academy has established the Widening Participation Research Service (WRPS - <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/wp/wprs>). This is a component of EvidenceNet, the Academy's new research, evidence and resource depository for the UK higher education sector. The WRPS is focused on the access and success of students from diverse backgrounds into, through and beyond higher education. It contains material relating to students from lower socio-economic groups, mature students, students with non-traditional entry qualifications, disabled students, black and ethnic minorities, low income students, and students from low participation neighbourhoods. It covers outreach, pre-entry, access, admissions, transition, induction, first year experience, retention, achievement, progression, postgraduate access, and transition to the labour market. Welsh institutions can take further advantage of this resource by contributing their research and evidence-informed practice to the WPRS and by using the WPRS evidence to inform their own practice. There are, for example, a number of syntheses of literature relating to major widening access and

equality issues. In addition, in England, Action on Access promotes the sharing of practice between partnerships and institutions; and this is supported by a number of JISC lists run by Action on Access and the Higher Education Academy to promote wider sharing of experience. Again, Welsh institutions and Partnerships could participate further in these fora to exchange information and practice.

10. Recommendations for Reaching Wider Partnerships

7. Map current and future engagement between HE institutions, between FE and HE, and other educational providers, to identify progression pathways, especially in vocational areas (paragraph 6.42).
8. Provide a cumulative and developmental programme of activities for engaging groups of people of all ages to enable them to progress to and through Higher Education (paragraphs 9.31).
9. Encourage Reaching Wider staff and Partnership institutions to act upon the challenges identified by the regional audits and in particular to share expertise and effective policies and practices within their own institutions and across the sector (paragraphs 9.50, 9.61).
10. Consider a greater role for partners other than HEIs to lead on, and provide additional funding for these Partnership activities (paragraphs 9.11, 11.23).

11. Funding of widening access and the Reaching Wider initiative

11.1 Use of HEFCW funding for widening access and Reaching Wider

11.10 The use of widening access funding is set out in the section of the strategies on short term targets and reported on each year through the annual monitoring process (AMS). The amount of detail provided on the use of funding within an institution was variable. Some institutions provided generic budget line headings (e.g. full time staff costs) and a small number accounted for expenditure against allocations using only the broad HEFCW funding stream titles (e.g. widening access premiums). Widening Access Premium funding was generally used to support staff appointments, to provide bursaries and financial support for students, and to deliver programmes.

11.11 Funding information provided in Reaching Wider Partnership proposals was generally provided under broad generic headings set by HEFCW (e.g. staff costs) along with allocations to major activities (e.g. mentoring). Annual monitoring statements also provided detail on expenditure. Overall, both widening access and Reaching Wider reporting paid close attention to accountability and it was particularly helpful to have expenditure related to the allocation headings used by the HEFCW. This latter approach enabled a comparison between spending on particular widening access priorities from institution to institution and across the Reaching Wider Partnerships.

11.12 For comparison, in England institutions are required to provide details of their investment in the wide breadth of widening participation activity documented in the WPSA. The emphasis is not on financial monitoring and accountability, but rather on demonstrating investment in, and the scope of activity contributing to, widening participation. It should be recognised however that, particularly for some institutions with large cohorts of students coming from diverse backgrounds, calculating specific investment on particular aspects within the broad area of WP is challenging.

11.2 Widening access and Reaching Wider sustainability

11.20 The Welsh institutional responses to the Arad Consulting evaluation noted the need for further consideration of long-term funding to support Reaching Wider activities. Institutions also commented on the impact of European funding changes on the sustainability of their widening access work. In previous years, institutions benefited from substantial European Social Fund support (approximately £16.35 million between 2002 and 2006). However, this was no longer available in the same way and to the same level. Some institutions were exploring the potential to gain support from the new EU Convergence Fund.

11.21 To assist institutions further in meeting Welsh Assembly Government priorities, in 2006 HEFCW provided an additional funding of £2.5 million in the

form of a Communities First premium together with funding for students recognised as 'hard to retain'.

11.22 For a substantial number of institutions widening access was a fundamental element of their institutional strategic plans and business models. Consequently, widening access funded activities for students once they were within an institution (e.g. retention and student support) appeared to be sustainable. The activities were well-embedded within institutional practice and commonly co-located with established administrative units (e.g. registry and admissions) and funded through the core grant to institutions.

11.23 In contrast, the Reaching Wider initiative funding appeared to be short term and heavily dependent on additional Welsh Assembly Government funding through HEFCW's Reaching Wider budget line. Without this funding there was, arguably, a large question mark over the sustainability of this work. Apart from the lead institutions in the Partnership, each HE partner usually had just one or two RW-funded staff members. Without continuing Reaching Wider funding it is possible that institutions would significantly scale back their commitment to Partnership activity, perhaps focusing on their own widening access programme with a smaller number of compact schools and FE partners. Institutions would need to make a judgement as to whether the collaboration provided by the Reaching Wider Partnerships gave sufficient benefit through economies of scale, pooling of resources and sharing of expertise to warrant ongoing funding of Partnership activities.

11.24 An interesting development within one Reaching Wider Partnership has been the sharing of responsibility for a winter college for NEETs (those not in education, employment or training) with the local education authority. The same Partnership has also shared responsibility for some activities with secondary schools. This approach of embedding responsibility for activities across a range of Reaching Wider partners provided a model for sustainability and is an example of effective practice. A similar approach can be seen in England with a number of Aimhigher partnerships devolving some responsibilities, and in some instances funding, to schools or local education authorities (LEAs) to create more sustainable delivery. However, these Aimhigher partnerships have found that the money made available to other partners needs to be both sufficient and significant for it to make a difference.

11.25 Like Welsh HEIs, most, if not all, English HEIs undertake general outreach work through Aimhigher aimed at raising aspirations towards HE and improving achievement prior to entry to HE. The current economic climate potentially threatens this more generic widening participation activity. Institutions may no longer choose to fund the wide range of outreach activity for the benefit of students generally and the sector as a whole, instead they will possibly target students who are likely to progress to their institution in the short to medium term.

11.26 In comparison to England, the Welsh approach involving institutional widening access strategies, regional Reaching Wider Partnerships and articulation strategies to join the two together represents an integrated and

evolved approach to widening access, which should be commended. In England WPSAs focus on the WP work of the institution, rather than local collaborative widening participation approaches, which are largely managed through Aimhigher area partnerships, and do not require formalised articulation agreements.

11.3 Student Fees

11.30 Almost all institutions provided some form of financial assistance to widening access entrants. As shown in the introduction, the majority of Welsh-domiciled students currently have favourable fee remission. However, this is to be phased out by 2010 with funding redirected to a smaller number of students with the greatest financial need. This, coupled with speculation that the current cap of £3225 on fees could be lifted, is a major concern to HE institutions as costs for the majority of Welsh HE students could increase significantly.

11.31 Another important fees-related issue is around bursaries and scholarships for part-time, and often adult, markets. The work of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and UCAS figures, referred to in the introduction (paragraphs 4.11 and 4.13), has shown a marked growth in HE applications from those aged over 21 years. A significant proportion of the mature and work-based student population is likely to register for part-time study pathways. Following the recommendations of the Graham review, financial support from HEFCW is provided to institutions to support part-time study. Having established strong part-time enrolment in Wales, consideration of future support for part-time students, when the current financial agreement ends in 2010, is needed. It should also be noted that is a requirement in the second phase (May 2009) of the Jones Group's Review of Higher Education.

11.32 In England, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) found that, in many institutions, the take up rate of student bursaries has been lower than expected. This is thought to be due in part to students being unaware of their eligibility. Currently Access Agreements are being appended to WPSAs and the documents will be integrated and reporting will be harmonised. As noted earlier, Welsh HEIs are not required to submit Fair Access Agreements.

12. Widening Access monitoring and evaluation

12.1 Institutional monitoring

12.10 Most institutions had robust mechanisms in place for monitoring widening access activity. Commonly, a Pro-Vice Chancellor, or other senior manager, had direct responsibility for the activity. The emphasis was on annual monitoring with some institutions using internal key performance indicators (e.g. on retention or employment) as performance measures. In a few widening access strategies there was occasional reference to monitoring outputs in order to shape future actions, but there was little evidence of this. Within institutions, more regular monitoring data on widening access activities, usually quarterly or half-yearly, was submitted to committees, task groups, dedicated centres and key staff, though the extent to which these groups/staff used this data to support strategic planning was unclear. Institutions were also required to submit annual monitoring statements (AMS) on the use of widening access funding to HEFCW.

12.2 Widening access targets

12.20 A requirement of HEFCW widening access funding was that institutional widening access strategies identified short, medium and long term targets. A grid detailing the target and other outputs featured in many of the strategies. Generally, the targets were a listing of events and activities with, in most instances, an estimate of the number of events and participants. This represented about the only measurable output element. It was also rare for the strategies to give more than a short term outlook. The lack of measurable targets, robust data and an emphasis on inputs rather than strategic outcomes was noted by Arad Consulting. In response to Arad's findings, institutions agreed that there was a paucity of impact measures but they maintained that this was partly due to a lack of target definitions. Notwithstanding the desire for more guidance, it appeared that institutions were, and continue to be, missing an opportunity for demonstrating the success of their widening access interventions

12.3 Widening access evaluation and impact assessment

12.30 The paragraphs above have demonstrated a strong commitment from institutions and Partnerships to detailing financial accountability for the use of widening access and Reaching Wider funding. However, institutional widening access strategies contained little evidence of evaluating the impact of activities. Where evaluation was mentioned it was usually in the context of obtaining immediate feedback from tutors and participants on events and other activities. There appeared to be a passive acceptance by institutions that HEFCW would commission comprehensive evaluative reviews such as that carried out by Arad Consulting and the Higher Education Academy. More proactive, robust impact assessment would support a business case for widening access both within institutions and across the sector.

12.31 The follow-up report by Arad Consulting in June 2007 included case studies that provided a qualitative contribution to the evaluation. Although these case studies alone did not provide robust and measurable impact information, they gave an indication of approaches to widening access which had led to positive outcomes.

12.32 As stated above, a major point made by Arad Consulting was the lack of tracking and monitoring of students engaging with pre-entry widening access programmes and events, particularly those provided through the Reaching Wider initiative. The institutional widening access strategies, written in 2006, made little or no reference to the tracking and monitoring of pre-entry widening access students. The Reaching Wider proposals, written in 2008, and the regional audits, submitted in late 2008, showed that Partnerships had responded to the Arad recommendations. One Partnership had developed a database and appointed a tracking officer to monitor the involvement of participants and schools and the others were in the process of developing or enhancing tracking, for example, by tracking year 12 students on the summer programmes into HE courses.

12.33 With regard to a more sophisticated approach to tracking students, there is a developing approach through the Managing Information Across Partners Programme (MIAP – <http://miap.gov.uk/products/lrs>). This was established in the UK in 2002 and the Welsh Assembly Government is a partner member in the development and consultation progress. MIAP, through its Learner Registration Service, assigns a Unique Learner Number (ULN) to every person over 14. The approach has been designed to streamline the collection and sharing of information between individual learners and education and training providers. The service will cover the education spectrum from schools, sixth form colleges to FE and HE institutions in England and Wales. The ULN will initially be introduced in post-16 learning in a limited number of schools and FE colleges in Wales and it is expected that HE institutions in England and Wales will start to use ULNs from September 2009. There would seem to be an opportunity, to take advantage of this tracking system. Adoption of MIAP would allow Reaching Wider Partnerships and widening access providers to monitor effectively a series of longer term engagements with targeted students from pre-entry to HE entry. This system will have the advantage of facilitating tracking students' entry to any UK HEI, whereas most current tracking systems appear to limit tracking to partner HEIs. In order to harmonise tracking and monitoring approaches between Welsh institutions a guidance 'toolkit' for tracking and monitoring could be developed by HEFCW in consultation across the HE sector.

12.34 In England, Aimhigher and HE institutions have been subject to strong pressure to demonstrate the impact of widening participation funding, including monitoring and tracking. This is now being tackled in a number of ways:

- more effective targeting guidelines from HEFCE;
- monitoring templates which collect common information from all Aimhigher partnerships and facilitate analysis;

- additional requirements for Aimhigher partnerships with regards to impact evaluation;
- support to improve the capacity of institutions and Aimhigher partnerships to undertake impact evaluation (support includes research by the NFER on Aimhigher partnership capacity – including availability of information and data - to undertake comparable impact evaluation, and an evaluation capacity development programme for institutions and partnerships led by Lancaster University – see below);
- national analysis of monitoring and evaluation data generated by Aimhigher partnerships; a new requirement for widening participation strategic assessments to demonstrate participation activity across the student lifecycle in institutions, set challenging targets and report progress annually.

12.35 The work on evaluating the impact of Aimhigher Partnerships and widening participation in institutions has been led by Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET) at Lancaster University. The approach has been to promote a selective rolling programme of evaluation seeking to evaluate parts of the programme each year, rather than to evaluate everything equally and continuously; further detail are provided by HEFCE (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/research/capacity/>). Other external evaluation and research of widening participation is also being carried out in England, for example, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) undertook an evaluation in 2005 and a further review is currently in progress with an interim report available on the capacity of Aimhigher partnerships to undertake impact evaluation (<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/AIM01/AIM01.pdf>).

13. Recommendations for HEFCW and/or the Welsh Assembly Government

11. Request institutions and Partnerships to produce and submit succinct widening access strategies that provide an overview of their work in this area (i.e. covering widening access, equality, retention, student success and links to other institutional strategies). These strategies should include intended outcomes and milestones in the short, medium and long term. More detailed information should be provided as appended documents. (paragraph 6.11).
12. Develop guidelines, in consultation with the sector, on identifying and targeting widening access groups, tracking and monitoring student progression and defining outcomes and demonstrating impact (paragraphs 6.53, 9.31, 9.51,12.33).
13. Encourage HE institutions to systematically collect, analyse and use common data on widening access, equality and student success to inform their work in this area. This support should take account of the developing MIAP system (paragraphs 6.43, 6.44, 7.30, 7.31, 12.33).
14. Require institutions and RW Partnerships to provide annual monitoring reports and updates which, for example, evidence their response to the Welsh Assembly Government policies and priorities, collaborative activities, the use of funding as well as the effectiveness of their interventions. These reports would form the basis of widening access strategic dialogues between HEIs and HEFCW (paragraphs 5.12, 11.10, 12.30).
15. Review the configuration of the Reaching Wider Partnerships to optimise the distribution of resources and the longer term viability of the regional Partnerships. Consider the longer term sustainability of the Reaching Wider initiative, in consultation with HE institutions and their Reaching Wider partners (paragraphs 9.13, 11.23).

14. Conclusions

14.1 Institutional widening access strategies

14.10 The documentation studied in this review has demonstrated a very strong commitment within Welsh institutions to widening access and a good measure of success. Study of the short, medium and long term targets showed considerable resources were devoted to pre-entry initiatives and programmes and to supporting students once they were within institutions. Moreover, the effectiveness of the support was reflected in the high overall rate of student satisfaction in the Welsh sector as a whole. In addition, UK-wide HESA statistics in recent years (see Table 1) have shown the Welsh HE sector consistently outperforming other UK HE sectors on a range of performance indicators for under-represented groups.

14.11 Thus far, widening access strategies have largely prioritised school leavers and young people. With a projected 4.9% fall in this age range in the coming decade there is a strong case for an increased focus on the all-age remit of *Reaching Higher*, while continuing to recognise the needs of young people, including looked after children and care leavers. Demographic projections indicated a population growth of about 12% for 25-29 year olds in the next 10 years or so further substantiating this increased focus on adult learners. This should be considered within the context of the very significant increases in recent applications from adults for HE entry as a result of the economic downturn. Therefore, there would appear to be a very persuasive business case for increasing widening access work targeted at adult learners. Studies in Wales and the UK show that around 70% of potential adult learners are already in employment so flexible study patterns and workplace learning are likely to assume increasing importance. Wales also has an advantage over England in that flexible, workplace learning can be accredited through the national credit and qualifications framework (CQFW).

14.12 While stressing the importance to the economy and society of further increasing adult learning provision in HE, funders and policy makers will want to ensure additional funding and staff development is provided, as appropriate. To increase work with adults at the expense of reducing schools/FE transition work would result in school-age young people missing out on HE aspiration-raising and skills opportunities. It is important, therefore, that HE widening access policies and strategies consider the balance between ensuring that young people are encouraged to achieve their full potential, including entering higher-level learning and skills where possible, while at the same time providing increased pathways to HE and higher level skills for adults.

14.13 In their current format, widening access strategies often have a rather awkward mix of strategic planning combined with considerable operational detail. Staff not directly involved with widening access may not find it helpful or useful to use such lengthy and complex documents. HEFCW might also find this style of reporting difficult in making meaningful comparisons between institutions and across the HE sector. This style of reporting could be a barrier

to achieving transformational change where all staff in an institution need to 'buy in' to the benefits of widening access. There is merit in institutions publishing, and sharing widely, short strategy statements. These would be similar to the WPSAs in England and capture key aspects of widening access strategy and institutional transformational change. Operational detail and financial monitoring information could be provided to HEFCW through separate supporting documentation, appended to the strategy statements. Such strategy statements could clarify the role and function of dedicated widening access centres, and their relationship to academic units and to the institution's mission and purpose.

14.14 Many institutions have well-established schemes for providing ongoing support to widening access students once they have enrolled within the institution. It would be beneficial to learners and partners if Reaching Wider Partnerships developed similar clearly-articulated approaches to participants on Reaching Wider programmes, for example, by developing clear progression pathways and focusing on the retention and achievement of Reaching Wider learners (see also paragraph 14.24).

14.2 Reaching Wider Partnerships

14.20 The Reaching Wider initiative has established a considerable range of activities and interventions involving further education colleges, secondary schools, adults, local communities, voluntary organisations, government agencies and local businesses. While at present it is difficult to evaluate fully the impact and outcomes of this collaboration, there is no doubt that Welsh institutions have taken their commitment to widening access, including the Reaching Wider Partnerships, very seriously. The Partnerships also showed commendable attention to accountability and the available documentation provided an audit trail of the practical application of Reaching Wider funding.

14.21 The Reaching Wider initiative and HEIs' widening access provision has had an all-age focus and current planning within the Partnerships appeared to be giving increasing attention to adult learning. In targeting adults, Reaching Wider Partnerships might take into account not only the adult-focused work within their partner institutions, but also of the long experience of the Open University in this context, through closer links with the Open University in Wales and organisations such as Niace Dysgu Cymru. In addition, the Partnerships should also look to establish links with the new adult community learning (ACL) partnerships sponsored by the Assembly Government.

14.22 As shown above, since their inception, the Reaching Wider regional Partnerships have contributed substantially to the widening access landscape. Recently though, it has become apparent that a review of the structure and composition of the Partnerships is needed. Reconfiguration could lead to a stronger set of partners and more efficient use of funding. With the recent and ongoing changes in the Welsh HE sector, as well as Reaching Wider Partnerships, there could be a case for a reduction to three Reaching Wider Partnerships based in South East Wales, South West Wales and North and

Mid Wales. The refresh could also address the value and effectiveness of links between HE institutions and FE colleges within the Partnerships. For instance, there could be greater attention to mapping out progression pathways, especially around vocational subjects, through Reaching Wider into FE and, where appropriate, on to HE. In this context, HE institutions could consider a fuller role for non-HE partners beyond their current role in representation on the Reaching Wider Practitioners' Group meetings and participation in the annual widening access conferences. An extended role could include assigning more responsibility for strategic planning and development to non-HE partners.

14.23 In response to the Arad Consulting evaluation of the Reaching Wider programme, institutions had hoped that greater consideration would have been given to sharing of effective practice between the Partnerships. There would be advantages in exploring ways in which the regular exchange of effective practice could take place between the Partnerships, in addition to the Practitioners' meetings and circulars. In this respect, there may be a role for national organisations such as the Higher Education Academy in contributing to the dissemination of effective practice.

14.24 As noted earlier, most institutions demonstrated commendable attention to financial accountability, however, there was also a recognition that, at present, evaluating the impact of widening access work is at an early stage. More efficient tracking and monitoring of Reaching Wider and widening access participants is essential. Ideally, tracking and monitoring should be undertaken in an agreed and coordinated way, by all institutions and Partnerships. Monitoring and tracking could involve the development, through consultation with the sector, of a guidance 'toolkit' and use of the MIAP Learner Registration Service. Improved tracking and monitoring of participants on Reaching Wider and widening access programmes could contribute towards demonstrating the full impact and success of this funding and contribute to an institution's and Partnership's business case for widening access

14.25 While HEFCW has commissioned the Arad and Higher Education Academy's reviews of widening access and Reaching Wider on a Wales-wide basis, the recent regional audits of Reaching Wider Partnerships have demonstrated a largely 'internal' qualitative approach to evaluation. While being valuable as reviewing and reporting mechanisms, these audits could be strengthened further by ensuring a clearer degree of externality and greater attention to comparison across RW Partnerships and with UK-wide practice and developments.

15. Recommendations

The recommendations below have been addressed to the principal stakeholders for widening access to higher education in Wales. As noted in the introductory paragraphs, this review is of a broad strategic nature and based on strategies and proposals that are near the end of their funding period. Therefore, this review recognises that it has not captured every detail of new and developing widening access activity taking place across the HE sector in Wales. Accordingly, the review anticipates that some of these recommendations may already be in hand in some institutions.

15.1 Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Higher Education Institutions should:

1. Work towards a whole institution approach to widening access, taking account of, equality and diversity, student support, retention, and success and progression beyond HE (paragraphs 6.33, 7.13, 7.14, 7.21).
2. Continue to ensure that there is clear senior management leadership, commitment to, and engagement in, this agenda, to continue promote institutional cultural change (paragraph 6.31).
3. Work with all staff to integrate widening access and equality and diversity in all institutional policies, functions and activities, and through strategic collaboration (paragraph 6.33).
4. Systematically collect and monitor data on widening access, equality and student success to identify trends and priorities for intervention and change (paragraphs 6.43, 6.44, 7.15, 7.30, 7.31).
5. Use institutional data, evaluation evidence and equality impact assessments to examine the potential and actual impact of interventions, policy, and practice (paragraphs 5.12, 6.53).
6. Provide sustained opportunities for students (including those from widening access groups) to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes within the institution (paragraph 7.40).

15.2 Recommendations for Reaching Wider Partnerships

Reaching Wider Partnerships should:

7. Map current and future engagement between HE institutions, between FE and HE, and other educational providers, to identify progression pathways, especially in vocational areas (paragraph 6.42).

8. Provide a cumulative and developmental programme of activities for engaging groups of people of all ages to enable them to progress to and through Higher Education (paragraphs 9.32).
9. Encourage Reaching Wider staff and Partnership institutions to act upon the challenges identified by the regional audits and in particular to share expertise and effective policies and practices within their own institutions and across the sector (paragraphs 9.50, 9.61).
10. Consider a greater role for partners other than HEIs to lead on, and provide additional funding for these Partnership activities (paragraphs 9.11, 11.24).

15.3 Recommendations for HEFCW and/or the Welsh Assembly Government

HEFCW and/or the Welsh Assembly Government should:

11. Request institutions and Partnerships to produce and submit succinct widening access strategies that provide an overview of their work in this area (i.e. covering widening access, equality, retention, student success and links to other institutional strategies). These strategies should include intended outcomes and milestones in the short, medium and long term. More detailed information should be provided as appended documents. (paragraph 6.11).
12. Develop guidelines, in consultation with the sector, on identifying and targeting widening access groups, tracking and monitoring student progress, defining outcomes and demonstrating impact (paragraphs 6.53, 9.32, 9.51, 12.33).
13. Encourage HE institutions to systematically collect, analyse and use common data on widening access, equality and student success to inform their work in this area. This support should take account of the developing MIAP system (paragraphs 6.43, 6.44, 7.30, 7.31, 12.33).
14. Require institutions and Reaching Wider Partnerships to provide annual monitoring reports and updates which, for example, show their response to the Welsh Assembly policies and priorities, collaborative activities, use of funding and as well as the effectiveness of their interventions. These reports would form the basis of widening access strategic dialogues between HEIs and HEFCW (paragraphs 5.12, 11.10, 12.30).
15. Review the configuration of the Reaching Wider Partnerships to optimise the distribution of resources and the longer term viability of the regional Partnerships. Consider the longer term sustainability of the Reaching Wider initiative through consultation with HE institutions and their Reaching Wider partners (paragraphs 9.14, 11.23).

Appendix 1 – Documentation supporting the review

- Institutional Widening Access Strategies 2006 to 2009
- Reaching Wider Partnership funding proposals 2008 to 2010
- Annual Monitoring Statements for Widening Access 2007/08
- Regional Critical Audits of Reaching Wider Partnerships 2008
- Minutes of the HEFCW Widening Access Committee 2006 to 2008
- Minutes of the Reaching Wider Advisory Sub Group 2005 to 2008
- Welsh Assembly Government circulars, policies and emerging agendas likely to impact on widening access and the *Reaching Wider Partnerships*:
 - *Reaching Higher, Higher Education and the Learning Country (2002)*
 - *The Learning Country: Vision into Action (2006)*
 - *Wales a Vibrant Economy (2005)*
 - *Skills That Work for Wales* and its associated *Action Plan (2008)*
 - *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales (2008)*
 - *A New Approach to Adult Community Learning (ACL) (2008)*.
- *Fair and flexible funding: A Welsh Model to Promote Quality and Access in Higher Education* (Rees report 2005)
- *Part-time Higher Education Study in Wales* (Graham report 2006)
- *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy - World Class Skills* (Leitch report 2006)
- *Promise and Performance: The Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales in the Context of the Learning Country: Vision into Action* (Webb report 2007)
- Arad Consulting: *The Evaluation of the Widening Access Activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative in Welsh Higher Education Institutions*: January 2007
- Arad Consulting: *The Evaluation of the Widening Access Activities and the Reaching Wider initiative: Additional Work to Support the Evaluation Consultation Process*: June 2007
- *Welsh Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategies 2007-08 to 2009-10; A Commentary from the Higher Education Academy* (2008)
- Phase 1 report (2008): Review of Higher Education in Wales by Professor Merfyn Jones
- Remit letters 2006 to 2009 from the Welsh Assembly Government to HEFCW

Appendix 2 - HEFCW Widening Access-related Circulars 2006 /2009

- W06/03HE: Widening Access
- W06/05HE: Widening Access Strategy Implementation Plans/Disability Provision Development Plans 2004/05 and 2005/06, Race Equality Impact Assessments in Widening Access
- W06/08HE: Widening Access
- W06/12HE: Part-time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme & Monitoring and Reporting
- W06/13HE: A New Disability Coordination Service for HEIs in Wales
- W06/20HE: Race Equality Polices, Action Plans and Reports
- W06/27HE: Widening Access Guidance
- W06/30HE: The HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme
- W06/41HE: Disability Equality Scheme Consultation
- W06/55HE: Welsh Medium Provision Fund 2006/07
- W06/56HE: Welsh Medium Premium Consultation
- W07/07HE: Gender Equality Scheme (GES)
- W07/08HE: 2004/05 Participation Rates
- W07/09HE: Consultation: The National Evaluation of Widening Access Funded Activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative
- W07/10HE: Reaching Wider Initiative
- [W07/20HE: Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme: Monitoring & Reporting](#)
- W07/24HE: Evaluation and Review of Institutional Race Equality Policies
- W07/25HE: Welsh Medium Provision Development Fund: Consultation
- W07/29HE: The HEFCW Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme 2007/08
- W07/35HE: Additional Support for Part-Time Students 2007/08
- W07/36HE: Welsh Medium Premium Payments
- W07/37HE: Widening Access to Higher Education Feedback
- W07/38HE: Reaching Wider Initiative
- W07/40HE: Evaluation and Review of Institutional Race Equality Policies Overview Report
- W07/45HE: Reaching Wider Funding Guidance 2008/10
- W07/49HE: Welsh Medium Provision Development Fund
- W08/11HE: HEFCW Equality Scheme Consultation
- W08/22HE: Widening Access to Higher Education: 2008/09 Allocations and Related Information
- W08/23HE: Additional Support for Part-Time Students 2008/09
- W08/27HE: The HEFCW Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme

Appendix 3 - An indicative range of activities developed by the Reaching Wider Partnerships

Raising aspirations for HE

ACE(Aiming for College Education) days
Taste of University Life
Taster days
Taster courses
GCSE revision

Skills raising activities: science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM)

Science Week
Science Circuit
Step-up to Science
Science Fun Days
Science Festivals Community Astronomy
Science and Technology Week
Engineering Simulator

Skills raising activities: arts

Extra Art Club
Art Summer School
Literature Festivals
Learning through Art
Art & Design role models
Theatre in Education

Skills raising activities: general work with schools

School Compacts
Step-up compact scheme
Campus Kids
After School Clubs
Masterclasses
Talent Opportunity Programme
Roadshows
Horse care and riding
Fancy a Bite
Sports Camps
Dragon sport
Mini Olympics
Learning through sport
Children's/Youth University
Fresh Start
Stock market Challenge

Working with adults

Writing Groups
Art Groups
Adult Learners' Week
Modern Language Groups
Migrant workers
Refugee/Asylum seekers

Mobile classroom
Work with U3A Groups
Learning Communities
Reaching Up

Appendix 4 – Benefits Arising from the Higher Education Progression Framework (HEPF) in England

Benefits for the targeted learner from under-represented communities:

- support for the learner at key times in the ‘journey’ to HE - removing barriers in a systematic way and at appropriate times
- support which can be tailored and targeted
- development of skills including self-reflection, career planning and decision-making
- greater understanding of the benefits of HE.

Benefits for schools and colleges:

- enhancement of the institutional educational context, including providing clear curriculum links over time. The most successful examples of a progression model are where the programme is valued and promoted by the school/college and integrated into the curriculum
- adaptation to individual as well as cohort needs and development of a student-centred approach.

Benefits for HEIs:

- learners understand HE and have the opportunity to develop the right skills
- it provides a mechanism for institutions to engage with learners prior to entry
- it helps learners to make the right choices and enhances the opportunities for progression.

Further details at http://www.actiononaccess.org/index.php?p=19_1_2_2

The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy supports the sector in providing the best possible learning experience for all students. It does this by:

- providing national leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice about enhancing the student learning experience
- operating as an independent broker, enabling expertise to be shared across institutions and subject areas
- working at multiple levels, with individual academics, subject communities, departments, faculties and institutions
- working across all parts of the UK, recognising the distinctive policy contexts and priorities of the devolved administrations but also providing opportunities to share expertise among them.

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