

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Reaching Wider Programme guidance

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Reference: W21/38HE
To: Reaching Wider Partnership Chairs
Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: RW Partnerships' strategy: **28 January 2022**
RW institutions' statement of intention: **28 January 2022**
RW Partnerships' implementation plan: **10 June 2022**
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This circular provides Reaching Wider Programme guidance and invites Reaching Wider Partnerships' strategies and implementation plans and Reaching Wider statements of intention from regulated institutions.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides Reaching Wider (RW) Programme guidance and invites RW Partnerships' strategies and implementation plans and RW statements of intention from regulated institutions for the strategy period 2022/23-2024/25.
2. This circular will be of interest to RW Partnerships and their members, regulated institutions, those responsible for widening access and fee and access plans and planners in higher and further education. Other education providers may find this guidance informative.
3. The guidance has been informed by a RW technical consultation together with involvement and advice from a range of partners and stakeholders. Our response to the consultation is set out in **Annex C**. Key changes to the RW Programme following consultation are set in **section 3**.
4. RW guidance is provided in six sections on:
 - i. HEFCW's RW Programme;
 - ii. the RW consultation;
 - iii. changes to the RW Programme in 2022/23-2024/25;
 - iv. the RW Programme strategy and funding for the period 2022/23-2024/25;
 - v. guidance on RW Partnerships' strategies and implementation plans;
 - vi. guidance on regulated institutions' RW statements of intention.
5. We recognise the context in which we are publishing this guidance:
 - following a period when institutions, staff and students have faced disrupted teaching and learning due to the pandemic;
 - as the Welsh Government takes forward the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill and the establishment of the new Commission from 2023](#);
 - as the Welsh Government implements [Renew and reform: supporting learners' well-being and progression guidance](#); and
 - in advance of the implementation of the new [Curriculum for Wales](#).
6. This guidance takes account, as far as possible, of the impact of these and other emerging policy developments to ensure that the RW Programme remains fit for purpose, sustainable and makes an effective contribution to widening access policy and post-16 education and training in Wales.
7. To increase the accessibility of this guidance we have included additional information in the following annexes:
 - **Annex A**: background to the RW Programme;
 - **Annex B**: our RW Programme strategy development, consultation and involvement process;
 - **Annex C**: summary of consultation responses and how we have taken account of them;
 - **Annex D**: RW national offer;

- **Annex E (a and b):** Partnerships' strategy and implementation plan templates;
- **Annex F:** regulated institutions' statement of intention template.

Section 1: HEFCW's Reaching Wider Programme

Background

8. The background to the RW Programme is available at **Annex A**.

Legislative and policy context

9. The legislative framework, for the RW Programme includes, but is not limited to:
- the [Equality Act \(2010\) and the socio-economic duty](#) (31 March 2021);
 - the [Well-being of Future Generations Act \(2015\)](#);
 - the [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#);
 - the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(2011\)](#);
 - the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill](#);
 - the [Welsh Language Standards \(2018\)](#);
 - [Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers](#);
 - [HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2021](#);
 - HEFCW's [Strategic Equality Plan for 2020- 2024](#); and
 - HEFCW's [Widening Access Strategic approach](#).
10. The RW Programme contributes to HEFCW's response to widening access by supporting priority schools, colleges, communities and learners. [HEFCW's 2021-22 remit letter](#) from Welsh Government includes two sections on supporting learners' transition to HE from schools and colleges (para 15) and on supporting school curriculum development (paras 33-35).
11. The two key themes of the RW Programme in 2023 to 2025 are:
- supporting disrupted learning in line with the Welsh Government's [Renew and reform guidance](#); and
 - aligning with the [four purposes](#) and [six areas of learning](#) of the [Curriculum for Wales](#).

Section 2: The Reaching Wider Programme consultation

12. The details of how we have involved and consulted with key partners are set out in **Annex B**.

13. We received 14 consultation responses. There were no responses suggesting that we should make significant changes, but a number of helpful steers were provided, although the responses represented a diverse range of views. A summary of the key themes raised by respondents and HEFCW’s response to them are set out in **Annex C**. Themes included:
- retaining and building on the RW Programme structure;
 - stating the benefits or unintended consequences to RW Partnerships of prioritising all ages and key groups up to level 4 learning;
 - confirming the benefits or unintended consequences of regulated institutions refocusing their fee and access plan contributions;
 - suggesting other ways in which RW priorities and structures could be met;
 - measuring the performance of the RW programme, including Partnership and institutional contributions to widening access in higher education; and
 - suggesting how RW funding could be used more effectively to widen access collaboratively, regionally and Wales-wide.
14. As part of the consultation we also received responses in relation to the Welsh language, the impact on obligations and objectives as set out by the [Equality Act 2010](#) and [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) which we have taken account of, as set out in **Annex C**.

Section 3: Changes to the RW Programme in the 2023/24 - 2024/25 strategy period

15. We have set out in **Annex B and C** how our engagements with stakeholders and the sector have informed changes to our guidance for this strategy period.
16. The key changes to the RW Programme are set out below:

RW Programme period: 2018/19 – 2021/22	RW Programme period: 2022/23 – 2024/25	Section of the guidance
RW Programme funding £3.4m.	RW Programme funding £3.7m per year.	Section 4, para 19
RW Partnership funding £1.7m.	RW Partnership funding £2m per year.	Section 4, para 19
RW Partnerships: Priority groups to age 16 supporting learners in WIMD areas up to level 4 learning.	RW Partnerships: Priority groups to age 18 to support learners in WIMD areas up to level 4 learning.	Section 5, para 39

RW Programme: No explicit focus on diversity and disability.	Additional Partnership and regulated institutions' priority groups within WIMD areas to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people with disabilities; • people ethnic minority backgrounds; and • Welsh medium learning, including supporting second language learning and promoting the cultures of Wales 	Section 5, para 19 and para 39
RW Partnerships: Broadly defined RW national offer.	More defined RW national offer.	Section 5, para 47
Integrated RW Partnership strategy and activity submissions.	RW Partnership three year strategy and annual implementation plan submissions.	Section 5, paras 50 and 51
Regulated institutions' RW strategy submissions.	Regulated institutions' RW statements of intention.	Section 6, para 63

17. The Tertiary and Education Research (Wales) Bill will create a new Tertiary Education and Research Commission by 1 April 2023. This will result in the dissolution of HEFCW, with the new Commission having regulatory oversight of higher education in Wales. How these amendments to the oversight of higher education will impact on 2023/24 and future fee and access plans will be communicated in due course.

Section 4: The Reaching Wider Programme priorities and funding for the period 2022/23 – 2024/25

18. The RW Programme will continue to comprise of two pillars. The two pillar approach supports collaboration between higher education institutions and RW Partnerships, whilst increasing the resources of the RW Programme.

Reaching Wider Programme Funding

19. From this strategy period HEFCW will fund the RW Programme on a three-year rolling basis and increase the RW Partnerships' funding to £2m a

year, subject to budget settlements from Welsh Government. Additionally, regulated institutions should continue to contribute £1.7m a year to RW collectively through fee and access plans. The total funding for the RW Programme will be £3.7m a year. HEFCW fee and access plan [guidance](#) for 2022/23 was published in June 2021.

Reaching Wider Partnerships

20. We will continue to fund three RW Partnerships. All higher education institutions in Wales should be members of RW Partnerships and we encourage them to engage proactively with their regional further education colleges and other partners. Other regional partners may vary, but we would encourage Partnerships to engage with local authorities, employers and their representatives, schools, the third sector and Careers Wales.
21. The Open University in Wales and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol will remain members of all three Partnerships. Partnerships should be mindful of the burden of their engagement on a Wales-wide basis.
22. A principle of RW Partnership funding which we adhere to is that funding during and across strategy periods should not materially destabilise Partnerships and that we will give reasonable notice of changes, including clawback and withholding of funding.
23. We are consulting on the RW funding allocation separately in a funding consultation. Given the increase of £300k a year across the RW Partnerships, the intention is that no Partnership will receive less funding in this strategy period than in the previous strategy period.
24. In confirming RW Partnership funding, HEFCW's Council "was supportive of the proposal to fund on a three-year rolling basis, but added that HEFCW grant funding should be recognised as an investment in activities carried out by the Partnerships, for which HEFCW would expect to see clear returns and outputs".
25. Partnerships must allocate the majority of their annual activity budget to long-term continuous activities, as set out in their strategies and implementation plans. Partnerships must provide a rationale for this investment and specify the amount and percentage of investment.
26. Partnerships may budget no more than 5% of their HEFCW core annual allocation for contingency funding. Partnerships must confirm, for HEFCW approval or otherwise, intentions to spend contingency funding.
27. Partnerships' allocations for this strategy period will be subject to submission of satisfactory strategies, annual implementation plans, annual monitoring reports, evidence of good practice and any further information and/or data requested by us to inform widening access policy development and monitoring. Normally, payments will be made in two tranches, October

and March each year. We reserve the right to withhold and/or clawback funding in the event of unsatisfactory strategies, annual monitoring reports or underspend. We expect funding to be spent in year and within the strategy period to which it relates.

28. Given the changes to post-16 education and the establishment of the new Commission, we do not consider it the right time to be making significant changes to the RW brand. However it is important the RW Programme is promoted effectively. During this strategy period we commit to reviewing the promotion and branding of the RW Programme with the RW Partnerships.
29. We expect that the Partnerships explicitly promote RW and its contribution to widening access in higher education as funded by HEFCW.

Regulated institutions

30. During this strategy period we expect regulated institutions to account for the same amount of funding as previously contributed to supporting RW through HE investment into RW activities through fee and access plans. We will monitor delivery against their statement of intention and fee and access plan [commitments](#).
31. Institutions' contributions to the RW Programme from 2022/23 should be:

Institution	Fee and Access Plan Commitment
Aberystwyth University	£147,986
Bangor University	£160,000
Cardiff Metropolitan University	£175,242
Cardiff University	£393,676
Swansea University	£282,332
University of South Wales	£320,177
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	£146,052
Wrexham Glyndŵr University	£71,000

32. We will report to Welsh Government on the use of fee and access planning funding to support the RW Programme.

Section 5: Reaching Wider Partnerships' strategies

33. During the 2022/23-2024/25 strategy period we will support the RW Partnerships to contribute to two new Welsh Government priorities:
 - supporting disrupted learning given Covid-19 ([Renew and Reform guidance](#)); and

- supporting the new Curriculum for Wales developments, as set out through the purpose and areas of learning ([Curriculum for Wales](#)).
34. We will continue to expect Partnerships to prioritise learners living in areas in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) and to take account of HEFCW's commitment to 'act in the spirit of' the socio-economic duty during this strategy period.
 35. To deliver against these expectations, the Partnerships should continue to engage the RW priority groups as set in the next section. RW Partnerships should engage with schools, colleges and communities where there are high proportions of RW priority groups. We accept that RW will deliver whole class activities and will monitor engagement with both priority groups and other participants. In this way, Partnerships will continue to take a whole school/college/community approach.
 36. We will encourage Partnerships to review their structures on a regular basis and at the start of the strategy period.

Continuing and new priority groups

37. In this strategy period, the Partnerships should extend the age range with which they work to include young people up to the age of 18.
38. Partnerships' priority groups in the bottom two quintiles (40% of the population) of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) should continue to be:
 - young people up to 16; and
 - adults over 21 years of age without level 4 qualifications.
39. Partnerships will also be expected to continue to support care experienced learners and carers in all age groups in their region regardless of WIMD.
40. In addition, new RW priority groups, living in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD, should include:
 - post-16 young people in up to level 4 learning, in addition to adults without level 4 qualifications;
 - people with disabilities;
 - people from ethnic minority backgrounds; and
 - Welsh medium learning, including supporting second language learning and Welsh cultures.
41. We are extending the age range of the because:
 - monitoring of institutional fee and access plans has not demonstrated to us that there are clear and effective transition or progression pathways and support for learners between Partnership provision and institutional RW provision with only one higher education institution establishing formal structures to effectively align Partnership and institutional RW delivery;

- we understand it has been more challenging for some FE partners to engage in Partnership delivery when the age group was limited to below 16 years of age; and
 - this will more closely align with the proposals set out in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) [Bill](#).
42. We expect a greater RW Programme focus on diversity and disability. Evidence suggests that these groups have been impacted disproportionately by the pandemic¹.
43. The decision to include young people aged above 16 within the Partnerships' remit responds to the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) [Bill's](#) aim to provide coherence in the post-16 sector. It also reflects continuity with the reforms to the school curriculum, enabling the sector to help learners grow as engaged and enterprising citizens, contributing to national and individual prosperity and well-being. Strengthening coordination between all aspects of tertiary education within the RW Programme is a vital step in realising the Welsh Government's [Vision](#) for the post-compulsory education and training sector. Partnerships are encouraged to build strong relationships with further education colleges in light of the anticipated transition to the new Commission.
44. In this strategy period, we expect Partnerships to increase delivery to support adults without level 4 qualifications and support progression to part-time learning and higher level skills. The impact of the pandemic and the need to enable reskilling and upskilling as part of lifelong learning and the contribution of higher education to civic mission agendas will be a priority for the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.
45. Partnerships should continue to establish and build on long-term and sustainable relationships with colleges, schools and other partners and participants.
46. We will also continue to encourage collaboration across the RW Partnerships, including through introducing peer review processes.

The Reaching Wider Programme's national offer

47. Our revised expectations for this strategy period include a reduction in the number of new and different activities and an increase in the number of engagements with individual learners, in line with our national offer.
48. The national offer of activities by the RW Partnerships must focus on raising educational aspirations and skills, including responding to learning equalities such as girls in STEM, and the transition and progression of learners, as identified in Welsh Government's Renew and Reform

¹ [How Covid-19 has impacted inequalities](#)

guidance. Partnerships must not fund nor deliver accredited provision. Further information is available at **Annex D**.

Assessment of Partnerships' strategies and implementation plans

49. The approval of RW Partnerships' strategies will be overseen by two HEFCW Council members and a NUS Wales representative to provide us with additional assurance that our investment in the Partnerships will deliver clear returns and outputs. The strategy and implementation plan templates are available at **Annex E (a and b)**.
50. To take account of the changing legislative, strategic and socio-economic environment in which the strategies are implemented, and to enable Partnerships to be agile in responding to regional need, RW Partnerships must submit annual implementation plans to us. Implementation plans will underpin the strategies and provide more detail to enable dynamic and effective delivery throughout the strategy period.

Partnership strategy submissions to HEFCW

51. Partnerships are invited to submit a three-year strategy to us by **Friday, 28 January 2022**. An electronic Microsoft Word version of the Partnerships' strategies should be submitted to us by email to Amanda Phillips (amanda.phillips@hefcw.ac.uk), along with a copy of the Partnerships' equality impact assessment and summary.
52. The RW Partnership implementation plan for 2022/23 should be submitted to us by **Friday, 10 June 2022**. An electronic Microsoft Word version of the Partnerships' strategies should be submitted to us by email to Amanda Phillips (amanda.phillips@hefcw.ac.uk).

Section 6: Reaching Wider regulated institutions' commitments

53. We expect institutions to build on their commitments to RW from the 2018/19 - 2021/22 strategy period and we encourage the inclusion of key elements from reports submitted as part of fee mitigation plans for 2018/19 to inform commitments in this new strategy period.
54. A significant change to the Reaching Wider Programme from 2022/23 is a different approach to the nature of institutions' contributions to the RW Programme (see para 39, section 5).
55. RW priority groups will require long-term sustained engagements to realise the effectiveness of the Programme. Regulated institutions should submit to us a statement of intention that will compliment and contribute to the

activities and services delivered by the RW Partnerships. These commitments should align with institutional strategic documents, including fee and access plan commitments, as well as with the relevant regional RW Partnership strategy. The statement of intention template is attached as **Annex F**.

56. The RW regulated institutions' contribution to the RW Programme should demonstrate a commitment to groups under-represented in higher education and to equality of opportunity, in line with fee and access planning. The statement of intention should confirm institutions' contribution to RW Programme-related widening access and outreach provision and respond to the Welsh Government expectations and HEFCW priorities on widening access, including as set out in section 1.
57. We will measure the regulated institutions' contribution to RW using the widening access national measures related to WIMD for widening access, retention and part-time:
 - The number and proportion of undergraduate Welsh domiciled students of all ages studying higher education courses at HEIs and FEIs in Wales who are domiciled in the bottom two quintiles (all undergraduates, all modes, levels and years of study are included);
 - The proportion of full-time undergraduate students in HEIs and FEIs in Wales who did not leave within 50 days of commencement and are present in higher education one year following year of entry for students domiciled in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD;
 - The proportion of part-time first degree students in HEIs and FEIs in Wales who did not leave within 50 days of commencement and are present in higher education two years following year of entry, for students domiciled in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD; and
 - The number and proportion of students attending higher education courses in Welsh HEIs and FEIs that are part-time, plus the percentage change year on year in the number of these part-time students compared to the equivalent figure for the UK (sector measure).

Regulated institutions' RW priority groups

58. With RW Partnerships working with priority groups to HE level 4, including adults without level 4 qualifications, as set out in section 5 above, we expect regulated institutions to work closely with their regional Partnerships to support people living in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) on supporting governance and planning, shared delivery, avoiding nugatory competition, and ensuring effective support and transition of RW priority groups to and though higher education.
59. We expect that regulated institutions will increase their focus on recruitment and retention of people from ethnic minority communities that are under-represented in higher education and people with disabilities.

These priority groups will align with institutions' action planning to support race access and success in higher education and equality of opportunity and contribute to institutions' strategic equality plans. Institutions will also be expected to align RW activities with broader Welsh Government policies on the Welsh language, including the cultures of Wales.

60. Institutions are able to support under-represented groups living outside their Partnership region including people who live in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD in other parts of Wales, care experienced people and carers, people with minority ethnic backgrounds, people studying through the medium of Welsh as well as other groups through their fee and access plan funding that is not ring-fenced for regional RW Programme support.

Assessment of regulated institutions' commitments

61. We expect regulated institutions as partners of the Partnerships to confirm that their activities are integrated with those of the RW Partnerships and that institutions and Partnerships will be working collaboratively.
62. We will review institutions' statements of intention to understand how they will contribute to long-term objectives of widening access and the prevention of barriers for under-represented RW priority groups to access and succeed in higher education.
63. Two Council members and an NUS Wales representative will assess institutions' statements of intention as part of the Reaching Wider assurance processes and we will report the findings and recommendations to our Council.

Submission of regulated institutions' statements of intention

64. By **28 January 2022** regulated institutions should submit to us their statement of intention. An electronic Microsoft Word version of the statement of intention should be submitted to us by email to Amanda Phillips (amanda.phillips@hefcw.ac.uk), along with a copy of the equality impact assessment.

Further information

65. For further information, contact Savanna Jones (email savanna.jones@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

66. This guidance has been developed taking account of the sustainability principle, the goals and the ways of working of the Well-being of Future

Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (The Act). The Act identifies five ways of working that should inform Partnerships' and institutions' approaches and we expect to see them reflected in RW submissions.²

67. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, including progression to Welsh medium level 4 study and potential impacts on the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. We invited consultation responses (October 2021) to consider the impact of our policy developments and we have responded to these in **Annex C**.
68. An impact assessment has been carried out with respect to the issues in this guidance and the outcomes were:
- There is a positive impact on **age** as RW is an all age agenda and we are increasing our expectations on RW Partnerships to improve engagement with adults without level 4 qualifications. This strategy period will include a focus on lifelong learning in line with the Tertiary Education & Research (Wales) [Bill](#).
 - There is a positive impact on **disability** and **race** as a increased focus has been included for Partnerships and regulated institutions, given the impact of the pandemic and disrupted learning on people from ethnic minority communities and people with disabilities.
 - There is potentially some positive impact on **sex** and **gender**, for example as Partnerships are encouraged to deliver activities that respond to learning inequalities e.g. girls in STEM.
 - Partnerships are required to take account of the **Welsh language** in delivering activities, provision and opportunities. Partnerships should comply with the Welsh Language Standards of the lead institution, unless other arrangements are in place.
 - There is a positive impact on the **socio-economic duty** on communities and places of interest given the focus on the bottom two quintiles of WIMD.
 - There is positive impact on **intersectionality**, in that it is used as a way of targeting those most in need of support where socio-economic disadvantage is seen to be greater.
69. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.

² The Well-being and Future Generations five ways of working: long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement.

Background to the HEFCW-funded Reaching Wider Programme

1. 'Widening access to and through higher education' is the term we use in Wales to define our strategic intentions in this policy area and frame our strategic objectives. We recognise that other parts of the UK use different terms which prioritise different widening access objectives.
2. The aim of widening access is to secure inclusion, progression and success in higher education to enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees.
3. HEFCW, as a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, has equality and diversity duties under the Equality Act 2010. Under the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015, HEFCW has responsibilities to work with providers to support equality of opportunity and increase the numbers of people under-represented in higher education. Widening access to and through higher education contributes to social justice, social mobility, wellbeing and health, including mental health, the skills and economic prosperity of individuals, of communities and of Wales.
4. The Reaching Wider (RW) Programme is one mechanism we employ to widen access to higher education. We established the RW Programme in 2002/03 as a Wales-wide, regionally focused, collaborative, long-term programme to widen access to higher education and higher-level skills.
5. The RW Programme aims to increase access to higher education, retention and success from priority groups and communities in Wales by raising educational aspirations and skills, and creating innovative study opportunities and learning pathways into higher education.
6. The RW Programme contributes to the principle, goals and ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, particularly but not limited to the goal of a more equal Wales. The RW Programme also contributes to HEFCW's commitment to 'act in the spirit of' the socio-economic duty of the Equality Act 2010. This duty was enacted by the Welsh Government in 2021.
7. [HEFCW's Corporate Strategy](#) from 2021/22, approved by the Welsh Government, is published on our website. Our Corporate Strategy objectives include to '*Challenge and support higher education providers to deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive education and training to all who could benefit from it, to meet the long-term social, cultural, economic and environmental needs of the local, national and global community.*'
8. HEFCW's [national measures](#) assist us in monitoring higher education performance. The widening access national measures apply to both higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education institutions (FEIs) in Wales and are both sector and individual institution measures unless otherwise indicated. The measures that are particularly reflected in the RW Programme development are listed below:

- i. The number and proportion of undergraduate Welsh domiciled students of all ages studying higher education courses at HEIs and FEIs in Wales who are domiciled in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD (all undergraduates, all modes, levels and years of study are included);*
 - ii. The proportion of full-time undergraduate students in HEIs and FEIs in Wales who did not leave within 50 days of commencement and are present in higher education one year following year of entry for students domiciled in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD;*
 - iii. The proportion of part-time first degree students in HEIs and FEIs in Wales who did not leave within 50 days of commencement and are present in higher education two years following year of entry, for students domiciled in the bottom two quintiles of WIMD; and*
 - iv. The number and proportion of students attending higher education courses in Welsh HEIs and FEIs that are part-time, plus the percentage change year on year in the number of these part-time students compared to the equivalent figure for the UK (sector measure).*
9. The national measures relate to the number and proportion of all Welsh domiciled students of all ages studying higher education courses at higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales who live in the bottom two quintiles of Lower Super Output Areas in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). Between 2016/17 and 2019/20 the number and proportion of undergraduate Welsh domiciled students of all ages within this measure has increased from 21,620 to 23,475 students and from 37.6% to 40.0%. The RW Programme is one mechanism by which institutions widen access and inclusion.

Our Reaching Wider Programme strategy development, consultation and involvement process

The guidance for the Reaching Wider (RW) strategy period for 2022/23 - 2024/25 has been informed by:

- advice from RW Partnerships, including Partnership Chairs;
- an initial consultation survey of RW Partners, including Partnerships and institutions;
- steers from HEFCW committees, including the [Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee](#);
- a review of regulated institutions' [fee and access plan](#) contributions to the RW Programme;
- a review of HEFCW-commissioned RW evaluation findings;¹
- ongoing equality impact assessment taking account of protected characteristics, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act goals and ways of working, and our Welsh language duties;
- engagements with individuals with expertise relating to widening access in higher education; and
- the [RW Programme 2022/23 - 2024/25 consultation](#).

¹ [Evaluation of the widening access activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative in Welsh Higher Education Institutions](#) by Arad Consulting Ltd (2007);
[A review of Welsh institutional widening access strategies 2006/07 to 2008/09 and the Reaching Wider funded proposals 2008/10](#) by the Higher Education Academy (led by HEA core staff) (2009);
[Review of widening access and Reaching Wider strategies in Wales](#) by the Higher Education Academy (led by HEA consultants Michael Hill and Sue Hatt) (2012);
[Access to Higher Education in Wales: A Report to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales](#) by WISERD (Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods) (2015).

A summary of consultation submissions and HEFCW's response to them

1. Fourteen submissions were received in response to the Reaching Wider Programme consultation circular [W21/27HE](#). We appreciate all of the responses received. We have taken these into account in finalising this guidance.
2. The consultation questions are provided below with a brief summary of key points raised and HEFCW's response to them. Similar points raised in response to different questions have been collected under the most relevant question for ease of responding. In some cases, we have included points made by one respondent which we thought were particularly helpful. Generally there were no significant changes recommended and little agreement on strong steers on new directions of travel for the RW Programme.

Question 1a: Do you agree that we should retain and build on some of the structures and priorities of the Reaching Wider Programme, particularly: the two pillar structure of the Reaching Wider Programme; the Reaching Wider Programme priority groups; supporting and promoting the Welsh language; and the Reaching Wider Partnerships' national offer framework and high-level description of interventions?

3. Summary of consultation responses:
 - Thirteen responses agreed that the two pillar RW structure should be retained.
 - Nine responses agreed that we should retain the RW Programme priority groups.
 - Six responses noted we should add to the priority groups with five new priority groups suggested, including disabled learners, estranged learners and learners from ethnic minority backgrounds.
 - Nine submissions were supportive of the RW Programme's position on promoting the Welsh language including contributing to Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy.
 - Three submissions specifically agreed that we should retain the national offer framework.
 - One submission suggested that we consider how an online, long-term, RW pathway to part time study should also developed given the impact of the pandemic.
 - One response noted that meaningful evaluation of the success of the two pillar approach could not yet be identified due to disrupted delivery because of the pandemic.

4. HEFCW response:

- We will retain the two pillar approach to recognise the collaborative benefits of multi-agency approaches, ensuring join-up and alignment between the Partnerships and regulated institutions. Regulated institutions' engagement with the Reaching Wider Programme should secure effective transition to and through higher education.
- We will retain and build on the RW Programme priority groups to include an increased focus on learners with disabilities and from ethnic minority backgrounds within the bottom two quintile of the WIMD.
- We will review and retain the RW national offer and articulate it more clearly.

Question 1b: If not, please tell us why and explain briefly how the structures and priorities should change?

5. Summary of consultation responses:

- One response suggested that Partnerships should review their staffing structures to ensure they were fit for purpose.
- One response suggested that progression to level 4 Welsh medium learning should be included as a target.
- One submission identified an unintended gap for 18-20 year olds who do not fall within the RW 'mature student adult' definition for support.
- One submission noted that partners operating at a Wales-wide level can face challenges due to differences between local Partnership priorities and provision and different strategic alignments between Regional Skills Partnerships.

6. HEFCW response:

- We will encourage Partnerships to review their structures on a regular basis and at the start of the strategy period, and continue to ensure appropriate communication between Partnerships' partners on priorities.
- Welsh medium learning continues to be a RW priority and we encourage the Partnerships to take account of this in delivering all means and modes.
- Our definition of adults includes 18 – 21 year olds, though we recognise the 'mature student' definition relates to adults over the age of 21 years.

Question 2a: Are there benefits or potential unintended consequences to the Reaching Wider Partnerships prioritising all Reaching Wider priority groups within their regions up to level 4 learning?

7. Summary of consultation responses:

- There was no consensus from the submissions as to whether RW Partnerships should support young people up to 16 or up to 18.
- One response suggested that a single point of contact provided by the Partnerships would be useful for the regional higher education providers.
- Two responses suggested that the focus of Partnerships working with learners up to age 16 years enabled a more targeted approach to learners and might result in less competition between partners.
- One response suggested that further education RW partners have easier access to 16-18 year olds and can support them more effectively through the RW Partnerships than through RW funded activities by regulated institutions.
- One response noted that alignment between RW Partnerships and Regional Skills Partnership areas presented some challenges.
- One response noted that changes to the age group limits for Partnerships and regulated institutions might lead to less focus on level 3 learners. Level 3 learners are currently within the remit of the regulated institutions rather than the RW Partnerships.

8. HEFCW response:

- We will expect the Partnerships to engage with young people up to age 18 in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation as well as adults without level 4 qualifications.

Question 2b: Are there benefits or potential unintended consequences of institutions refocusing their Reaching Wider fee and access plan contribution?

9. Summary of consultation responses:

- One response suggested that schools may not fully respond to a wider range of priority groups.
- One response suggested clear benefits to institutions refocusing their RW commitments.
- One response suggested it would be more valuable to include learners between 16 and 21 within the RW Partnerships' portfolio to ensure clear progression with RW support.
- One response suggested that an increase in priority groups may stretch RW resources.

10. HEFCW response:

- HEFCW's guidance expects the RW fee and access plan contributions to complement, promote, support and align with the Partnerships' planning and delivery and avoid nugatory duplication.

Question 3: What other ways might Reaching Wider structures and priorities be enhanced and what is the evidence for this?

11. Summary of consultation responses:

- One response suggested that Partnerships should extend their activities to include young people up to age of 20 years without level 4 qualifications in RW priority areas as well as adults without level 4 qualifications.
- Two responses suggested better alignment between RW priority groups and under-represented groups in HE would be welcomed.
- One response welcomed better engagement between Partnerships and highlighted the benefits of cross Partnership working that could be increased in the next strategy period.
- Two responses suggested that sharing of good practice through one platform would be beneficial.
- One response suggested a Welsh 'widening access directors group' should be established to facilitate institutional and RW agendas.
- One response suggested RW structures should enhance development and delivery of apprenticeship opportunities.
- One response suggested that HEFCW should lead on effective tracking systems to better understand the long term impact of the RW programme.

12. HEFCW response:

- We will continue to encourage collaboration across the RW Partnerships, including through introducing peer review processes, as recommended by our Student Opportunity and Experience Committee (SOAC) to inform annual monitoring and share practice.
- We will expect the regulated institutions' statements of intention to commit to contributing to, and building on, the RW Partnerships' strategies and implementation plans.

Question 4: How should we measure the performance of the Reaching Wider Programme, including the contributions from the Partnerships and higher education institutions, to widening access to higher education?

13. Summary of consultation responses:

- Four responses suggested that learners should be tracked through the RW Programme including their learning outcome in terms of attending higher education. A system used by all Partnerships would be preferable.
- One response noted that data should continue to be collected and reported on an annual basis.
- One response noted that all activities and programmes should be evaluated to include participant attitudes towards university and higher-level education, before and after any interventions.
- Two responses suggested that Partnerships' performance should be based on the learner engagement or access to higher education UK-wide and not an institution's WIMD recruitment performance.
- One response suggested a continued national focus on the national offer.
- Three responses suggested that evidence of success stories through case studies would contribute to qualitative evidence.
- One response suggested long-term engagement with schools was an effective measure.

14. HEFCW response:

- We will continue to require Partnerships to submit annual monitoring to us including both quantitative and qualitative evidence.
- We will continue to encourage Partnerships to demonstrate long-term engagements with RW priority groups.
- We will continue to encourage regulated institutions to engage with the same learners engaged in RW Partnerships' activities to support effective transition and progression. We recognise that the transition to the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) could present opportunities for better tracking data.

Question 5: How might Reaching Wider funding be used more effectively to widening access to higher education collaboratively, regionally and Wales-wide?

15. Summary of consultation responses:

- Two responses noted further collaboration between Partnerships and institutions would be welcomed.
- Two responses suggested increased staffing support would enable increased delivery.
- Four responses suggested that a stronger brand identity would strengthen the RW profile.

- One response suggested there should be investment in external monitoring and evaluation of RW processes and procedures.
- One response suggested that the RW Programme should increase its prioritisation of the Welsh language.
- One response suggested that Partnerships should deliver regional targeted mentoring schemes to individuals from under-represented groups to improve engagement with higher level learning.

16. HEFCW response:

- We will expect clear alignment between institutional and Partnership working and the avoidance of nugatory competition.
- We will include mentoring schemes in the RW Partnerships national offer.
- We will continue to use external evaluators to review widening access and the Reaching Wider Programme as well as expecting Partnerships to undertake peer reviews to inform the monitoring process and share practice.
- We will encourage the Partnerships to promote more effectively and strengthen the existing RW brand as we move through transition into the new Commission and into a new post-compulsory education structure.

Question 6: Do you have any further feedback that could not be easily included in the questions above?

17. Summary of consultation responses:

- One response noted the important of developing strategies which took account of the impact of the pandemic on delivery.
- One response suggested the RW Programme should increase its focus on working with young people with protected characteristics within the bottom two quintiles of the WIMD.
- One response suggested the benefits of a RW grant agreement to inform agreements with partners.

18. HEFCW response:

- We will set out expectations for RW Partnerships to respond to Welsh Government's Renew and Reform agenda supporting learners' well-being, transition and progression, including supporting disrupted learning.
- We will expect RW to increase its focus on supporting priority learners from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities.

Question 7: Do the proposals have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act's sustainable development principle, seven wellbeing goals, and five ways of working?

19. Summary of consultation responses:

- Five responses suggested that the RW Programme contributes effectively to the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act's five ways of working and seven well-being goals, particularly a more equal Wales and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
- One responses noted that the RW Programme has a key role to play in enabling people to achieve their potential and play a key role in the sustainable future of Wales.
- One response suggested that the Act's ways of working and goals complement the wider work of the Regional Skills Partnerships.
- One response suggested there should be greater focus on supporting adults to access part time higher education.

20. HEFCW response:

- We will expect the RW Programme to have a positive impact on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's principle, goals and ways of working.
- We will encourage a greater focus on supporting adults to access part-time higher education and lifelong learning.

Question 8: What positive or adverse effects will the proposals have on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?; and***
- treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?***

21. Summary of consultation responses:

- One response noted that priority groups should be given the opportunity to use the Welsh language in RW activities, by increasing collaboration with organisations that can offer activities through the medium of Welsh.
- One submission noted that the intersectionality of prioritising the bottom two quintiles of the WIMD and Welsh medium learners is challenging.

22. HEFCW response:

- We will continue to expect the RW Programme to have a positive impact on the use of the Welsh language, including in learning and teaching, and we

will challenge Partnerships to demonstrate clear Welsh and bilingual delivery.

Question 9: Could the proposals be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects, on:

- i. opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?; and***
- ii. treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?***

23. Summary of consultation responses:

- One response suggested that the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol should be more involved in the RW Partnerships to offer support and opportunities for collaboration on targeted RW projects.
- One response suggested that there should be a wider range of activities delivered through Welsh medium.
- One response noted there could be further opportunities for sharing of resources and interesting practice.

24. HEFCW response:

- We will encourage the RW Partnerships to engage fully with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol as a RW national partner.
- We will expect Partnerships to demonstrate a strategic commitment to the delivery of bilingual and Welsh medium activities and to set this out in their implementation plans.

The Reaching Wider Programme: The RW Partnerships' National Offer

1. We introduced the Reaching Wider (RW) Programme national offer with the 2014/15 RW strategy. The national offer is the RW delivery framework and should be used by Partnerships to articulate their provision to all partners, learners and HEFCW.
2. We are re-affirming and strengthening the national offer in the 2022/23 - 2024/25 strategy period to enable Partnerships, partners and learners to be clearer and more focused on their regional delivery offer.
3. The Partnerships' national offer must comprise largely of interventions identified as good practice in widening access through UK or international evidence.
4. The national offer priorities are intended to be high-level to enable Partnerships to work flexibly within them to respond to regional needs and priorities and to engage learners of all ages. In this strategy period the Partnerships' national offer activities should contribute and respond to:
 - The priorities set out in [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill](#) including as they relate to lifelong learning, civic mission and equality of opportunity;
 - The Welsh Government's [Renew and Reform guidance](#) to support disrupted learning, transition and progression through the education system; and
 - [Curriculum for Wales](#) developments.
5. Additionally, the purpose of the national RW Programme offer remains to:
 - contribute strategically to HEFCW widening access priorities and measures and to align with national priorities through a coherent provision offer across Wales;
 - support equality of opportunity and under-representation in further and higher education;
 - ensure innovative, high-quality and excellent practice is accessible across Wales;
 - enable HEFCW and the sector to review progress and performance in key areas of widening access; and
 - contribute to the coherence of the RW brand in order to promote the RW Programme regionally, nationally and across the UK.
6. The national offer has five priorities:
 - i. **Supporting transition** to increase confidence, progression, lifelong learning and success. This provision may include primary to secondary school interventions, important transitions between key stages, family

- learning and engagement and adult learning, FE to HE progression, bite-size provision, promoting 14-19 progression pathways;
- ii. **Supporting educational aspiration-raising** to increase motivation, retention and progression. Provision may include work with schools, colleges and communities, family learning and engagement activities, interventions to prevent learners becoming 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET), working with those with the potential to disengage with education or training, activities to experience university learning and life;
 - iii. **Enhancing educational skills** to enable learners to fulfil their academic potential and be prepared for further and/or higher education. Provision may include subject-specific and/or generic skills support, after school clubs, mentoring, GCSE and A level revision, master classes, residential provision.
 - iv. **Promoting vocational and employability skills** to encourage upskilling, career aspirations, including access to apprenticeships and the professions. Provision might include school/Partnership/employer partnerships around corporate social responsibility and civic mission agendas, awareness raising around the world of work, general and vocational opportunities, workforce development, pathways to part-time further and higher education and apprenticeships.
 - v. **Promoting equality of opportunity and inclusive approaches** for care experienced people, carers and people with disabilities. Provision might include support with ethnic minority communities, refugees and asylum seekers, travellers and gypsies, people with disabilities and/or work with young, white, working class males. Provision for groups identified under priority five will be delivered through the priorities above.
7. The four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, personal effectiveness and planning and organisation can be met through the five priorities above.
8. The five national offer priority areas listed above contribute to the Curriculum for Wales four purposes to support learners to become:
- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
 - enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
 - ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world;
 - healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.
9. We consider these four purposes relevant for people of all ages.
10. Activities delivered under the national offer priorities above should contribute to the Curriculum for Wales six areas of learning and experience when working with schools namely:

- The expressive arts, including art, dance, film, drama, music, digital media;
 - Health and well-being, including a healthy body, a healthy mind, healthy relationships, making good life decisions;
 - Humanities, including history, geography, religion, values, ethnics, business, social studies;
 - Languages, literacy and communication;
 - Maths and numeracy; and
 - Science and technology, including nature and natural forces.
11. Information and advice on further and higher education, training and graduate employability should underpin all five priorities of the national offer.
 12. The RW national offer should take account of range of delivery modes, including part-time and flexible learning, online and in person delivery, community outreach and Welsh language provision.