

THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Better Wales: Better Opportunities for Learning

1. One of the major themes of Better Wales is the need to put more investment in people and lifelong learning so that everyone, and particularly young people, can gain the range of knowledge and skills required to fulfil their potential and prosper in the new economy. For higher and further education, some of the **key results wanted by March 2003** across Wales as a whole are:

- a reduction in the number of 16-18 year olds without qualifications to some 1

in 20;

- a reduction in the proportion of adults of working age without qualifications to fewer than 1 in 7;
- the proportion of adults with functional basic skills in literacy and numeracy to increase sharply; and
- an additional 36,000 students to be attracted into higher and further education.

South Wales Valleys - What needs to be done

2. To achieve sustainable improvement in the Valleys, there is a need to:

- develop and promote equal access to education, training and employment for all;
- take specific measures to reach and engage disadvantaged groups, encourage progression, and enable take-up of opportunities to acquire skills and abilities to increase, participation, personal development, and employability;
- raise participation and achievement in education and training by young people at risk of underachievement or disengagement;
- overcome barriers to training, eg transport, childcare etc;
- develop widespread opportunities for on-going learning at all levels in order to nurture the skills and talents of the population; and
- ensure that action taken supports the acquisition of both basic skills and of the generic skills that employers increasingly require.

3. In addition to securing greater participation, there is also a need to focus on the development of

a skilled workforce. In this respect, there will be a need to:

- raise productivity within the workforce;
- enhance management development, to improve business performance and increase competitiveness;
- develop information technology skills;
- provide relevant and tailored training, delivered in a flexible and innovative manner, and focused, in particular, on delivering skills needed by smaller firms;
- develop specific skills training in marketing, particularly internationalisation and exporting;
- develop and promote entrepreneurship, eg: education and training for small business ownership; entrepreneurial education; continuing small business education; small business awareness education; skills support for the development of potential women entrepreneurs; and
- increase the number of ICT professionals in the region, and, in particular, to focus on encouraging and supporting women who are underrepresented in the profession. ICT can also play a major role in developing the skills needed to enhance the adaptability and employability of the workforce.

South Wales Valleys - how this will be achieved

A. FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION

4. Four of the 27 FE institutions funded by the FEFCW are based in the South Wales Valleys area: Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil, Pontypridd and Ystrad Mynach Colleges. Provisional enrolment figures for these institutions in November 1999 total 21,765 (7,984 full-time equivalents (FTEs)). In addition, several other FE institutions (Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Gorseinon, Gwent and Neath Port Talbot Colleges) offer provision via subsidiary campuses or outreach centres in the Valleys, although their main campuses are located outside this region. The number of outreach sites operated by institutions in the region is as follows:

Institution	number of outreach sites used in 1997/98 (latest data available)
Aberdare College	27
Merthyr Tydfil College	22
Pontypridd College	106
Ystrad Mynach College	13
Bridgend College*	60

Coleg Gwent	54
Neath Port Talbot College**	data not available
Gorseinon College	2
Carmarthenshire College	13
WEA(S)	215
YMCA	40

*includes Pencoed College

** includes Afan College

5. As well as community based learning run by the colleges themselves, outreach sites have significant levels of provision delivered through third party arrangements with LEA adult education providers, and work-based, employer-linked programmes. A variety of venues are used by colleges for such provision, such as social clubs, schools (both primary and secondary), chapels, community centres, as well as specifically designated learning centres and campuses.

6. In summary:

- i. provision is available across all programme areas throughout the South Wales Valleys region;
- ii. there is a balance of general education and vocational training available;
- iii. the area is well served for education and training in programmes areas associated with traditional industry. Construction and engineering provision, for example, are showing steady growth (mainly concentrated on the larger campuses of Pontypridd, Bridgend and Gwent) and there is a large enough number of students to enable these institutions to develop the facilities needed to ensure appropriate upskilling;
- iv. there is **widespread availability of programmes across qualification levels**, as well as of programmes accredited by the Open College Network, and of short training and education programmes - such provision enables individuals to enter and progress at a pace and level with which they are comfortable;
- v. there is strong growth in information technology (IT) programmes - such programmes are

- strongly associated with economic regeneration, as well as playing a key role in motivating individuals (such as excluded young men) to take up further learning opportunities;
- vi. although there has been growth in the provision of IT, there is evidence that the institutions in the valleys have seen slower growth in other areas of provision no less important to economic development - there is clear evidence of a contrast between institutions in the Valleys with the more prosperous regions of Wales, particularly in relation to secretarial/ office technology programmes and business and management programmes. Secretarial/ office technology programmes have belatedly shown accelerating growth in participation rates, but growth in business and management provision is still slower in the Valleys than elsewhere;
- vii there is widespread availability of programmes in basic literacy and numeracy, especially at outreach sites within the community. Participation on these programmes has, however, shown mixed growth.

Low Participation rates

7. Despite the many venues and extensive provision in the region, the Valley communities still have some of the lowest participation rates in the principality. This region also has one of the worst levels of basic adult literacy and numeracy in Western Europe. This illustrates the extent of effort required by providers to engage those who have become disaffected, and also has implications for the capacity of institutions to grow, and maintain financial viability.

8. Recruiting and keeping such learners entails substantial costs for providers, in time and resources. Such costs are due to the groundwork required to identify disengaged groups, and engage their interest in learning, either directly or through discussion and negotiation with other agencies and community/voluntary groups with a foothold in the community. Maintaining the motivation of students, and helping to meet their additional learning needs, also means added costs. The challenge for the smaller institutions in the Valleys (Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil) is all the more significant.

Main challenges

9. Summary of main challenges for Further Education institutions in the Valleys:

- sustaining the increase in participation in education and training;
- improving the level of basic and key skills despite the high cost to colleges of recruiting and retaining students;
- increasing outreach to encourage disengaged individuals to take up learning opportunities;

- maintaining the motivation of students to progress to higher levels of skill and achievement;
- improving and adapting college estates to attract and provide for students;
- contributing to work based and employer related education and training;
- ensuring dynamic management and governance of the institutions;
- and to meet these challenges while maintaining financial viability.

10. The Further Education Funding Council for Wales is tackling these issues through various funding mechanisms and initiatives, details at Annex A. Briefly, additional funding is provided to institutions which recruit students from socio-economically deprived areas; adults from disadvantaged or ethnic minority backgrounds are targeted and offered learning programmes; links have been established between the further education and higher education sectors to encourage better access and progression for students; and students and prospective students can take advantage of the Basic Skills Development Fund, Training and Consultancy services, Inclusive Learning Development Fund, the University of Industry; and Access and New Opportunities Funds.

11. Annex B gives details of specific activities undertaken by Valleys based Colleges.

B. PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS

12. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has recently produced a publication which provides information on higher education participation rates in Wales, *Participation rates for Welsh students in higher education within the UK during 1997/98*. This highlights the particular problems faced in the South Wales Valleys. Participation rates for full and part-time students, young and mature entrants are consistently below the average in the unitary authorities of Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen. In Neath Port Talbot the picture is less severe for part-time numbers, although full-time participation is weak.

Higher Education Provision

13. There are three higher education providers in Wales whose location takes them into the South Wales Valleys and who are active in seeking to bring higher education opportunities within the reach of their inhabitants: the University of Glamorgan in Pontypridd, University of Wales College, Newport, and University of Wales Swansea. Information published last year on a UK basis for 1997/98, due to be updated shortly, shows that the University of Glamorgan and UWC Newport take significant numbers of students from state schools and from low participation neighbourhoods. Swansea Institute of Higher Education also makes an important contribution in this regard. A table giving more detail together with information on part-time provision; the Community University of the Valleys; Widening Access to include Admission Schemes is at Annex C.

Additional Finance

14. The HEFCW recognises that there can be extra costs for institutions in providing recruitment policies and procedures geared to widening access, as well as offering support and guidance to students to help ensure they successfully complete their studies. From 2000/01 (in addition to the widening access funding of £1.5 m per annum and £5 m per annum for Welsh higher education institution to establish compacts with a number of schools in deprived areas), the Council is allocating an annual premium of £150 a head to institutions for all students whose home postcodes are defined as being in economically deprived areas. While this, of course, applies to students attending Welsh higher education institutions from the UK as a whole, it is an important measure of support for institutions such as Glamorgan and Newport who have a high percentage of students from such backgrounds. Thus of the £1.6 million in total which is being allocated in 2000/01 £425,000 will go to Glamorgan and £212,000 to Newport.

Improving qualifications and skills of employed

15. Higher education institutions also have a role in improving the qualifications and skills of those in employment. The University of Glamorgan has a Work-based Learning Office which forms a central contact point for learners in the workplace who want to study programmes and modules at the University. It is also appointing an officer to promote the accreditation of existing skills and prior learning. As a whole, Welsh higher education institutions can offer a wide range of expertise and training to employers, including the SMEs within their regions. HEFCW provides funding each year (£820,000 in 2000/01) to Welsh higher education institutions to develop and extend their Training and Consultancy Services. As well as, of course, generating income for the institutions concerned, such services are seen as particularly important to economic improvement. Glamorgan earned just over £2 million in training income in 1998/99 and Newport £1.3 million. Together their total income for training and consultancy services was nearly £7 million.

16. Later this year, the HEFCW plans to ask each higher education institution to send the Council its widening access strategy. This will give the Council a fuller picture of the activities of the higher education institutions in Wales.

ANNEX A

FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION

Widening Participation Factor

1. Through the HEFCW's recurrent funding methodology, additional funding is provided to institutions which recruit students whose home postcodes are in socio-economically deprived

wards (based on the National Assembly's indices of ward deprivation). For the academic year 2000/01, approximately £5 million has been allocated for this purpose, of which over £3.25 million has been allocated to the eleven institutions offering provision in the valleys. The allocation to the four valley-based institutions is just under £1.4 million.

Non-schedule 2 funding

2. Since 1999/2000, all institutions have been able to bid for funding for non-schedule 2 provision, ie. courses which do not lead to a formal qualification or formal progression to a higher level. This will facilitate growth in provision targeted at adults from groups such as ethnic minorities and the socially excluded whose background has disadvantaged them, and enables institutions to offer learning programmes aimed at encouraging participation and eventual progression. In 2000/01, just over £700k has been allocated to the FE sector for this initiative, of which over £450k has been allocated to the eleven institutions operating in the valleys. The allocation for the four Valleys-based institutions is just under £126k.

Further and Higher Education Partnership Fund

3. The aim of the fund is to establish links between FE and HE institutions which encourage better access at FE and HE levels, as well as progression through FE to HE. Twenty one FE institutions are currently participating in a total of seven FE/HE Partnership Fund projects. Projects funded include £110k to the University of Wales College, Newport, in partnership with the WEA (South) and Coleg Gwent, to identify sustainable approaches to raising participation levels in further and higher education in the north Gwent valleys, and widen opportunities for progression by individuals from further to higher education. The FE/HE Partnership Fund has built on developments such as the Community University of the Valleys, in which collaborative approaches by providers have sought to take learning opportunities into a community setting.

Basic Skills Support Development Fund

4. The FEFCW's £1 million Basic Skills Support Development Fund was launched in March 2000, and has resulted in allocations to all colleges in the South Wales valleys to improve the effectiveness of basic skills support for students on mainstream programmes. The total allocation, to 11 institutions, is just over £451,200.

Training and Consultancy Services (TACS)

5. The FEFCW's Training and Consultancy Services (TACS) fund, started in 1999/2000, finances projects linking further education institutions with industry and commerce (particularly SMEs), the professions and the public sector. The fund enables institutions to expand the availability of full-cost bespoke training for local employers, as well as develop the infrastructure necessary for the delivery of training and consultancy services and to widen the scope of income generating activities. The total allocation for 1999/2000 was £305,000.

Inclusive Learning Development Fund

6. In 1999, just over £250k was allocated by FEFCW to institutions through the Inclusive Learning Development Fund. This aim of this fund is to encourage institutions to look at inclusive learning in a broad context (rather than focusing solely on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities), with implications for widening participation and social inclusion. Outcomes are due to be disseminated to the sector in May 2000.

University for Industry/learndirect

7. The University for Industry (Ufi) aims to create a nationwide open and distance learning network providing a range of flexible learning packages. In spring 2000, the National Assembly made available £170k which was distributed by the FEFCW as development funding for Ufi learndirect provision delivered between January and July 2000. For 2000/01 the FEFCW has allocated £500k to FE institutions for provision related to Ufi/learndirect, of which almost half has been for institutions operating in the South Wales Valleys.

New Opportunities Fund

8. The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) distributes National Lottery money for education health and environmental initiatives. The first grants were made in 1999 and in the field of education in Wales the NOF intends to provide nearly £60m by 2002, including £13m for community access to lifelong learning including learning centres and community grids for learning, and £6.5m for a network of ICT learning centres in public libraries. NOF supported projects aim to benefit the socially excluded and disadvantaged communities. For adults, the emphasis is on encouraging people to return to learning and to acquire basic skills.

Access Funds

9. The FEFCW is responsible for the allocation of Access Funds to institutions for them to award at their discretion to students (or potential students) suffering financial hardship. In the light of the significant increases in Access Funds (£0.5m in 1998-99 to £4.2m in 2000-01, and £6.1m in 2001-02), a sector reference group has been convened to identify good practice in the use of access funds, and to consider options for allocation.

ANNEX B

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY VALLEYS BASED COLLEGES

South Wales Valleys - Links with Business and Industry

1. Each of the four FE institutions based in the South Wales Valleys area has, to varying degrees, undertaken activities to develop links with, and meet the skills needs of, local employers and the needs of potential and existing employees. The colleges' strategic plans highlight, again to varying extents, the need to expand this area of work. The FEFCW has provided funding for several of these developments.

2. Aberdare College’s Business Development Unit offers a wide range of services, including conference facilities, to employers throughout Rhondda Cynon Taff and surrounding areas. All training programmes are planned in partnership with industry.

3. Merthyr Tydfil College is aiming to extend collaborative links with national training organisations and local industry. For example, it has established a Plastic Employers Group, and continues a regular dialogue with the Business for Merthyr Forum and the Merthyr Business Club. The college has built relationships with employers through the ADAPT Village Trader, Sustain and Teamwork for SME projects.

4. Pontypridd College provides a range of courses to meet the needs of business and service industries. It is a member of the South East Wales Education for Industry Consortium (SWEFIC), which comprises Pontypridd, Barry, Bridgend, Glan Hafren and Gwent Colleges. The consortium aims to identify the training needs of the electronics and microelectronics, semi-conductor, aerospace and automotive industries at technical level. For example, it has collaborated with Atlantic Technology (Crumlin) to provide training opportunities for the firm’s employees. Learning materials and resources have been produced and staff development put in place to underpin the pilot schemes. The consortium continues to work with SE Wales TEC, the Welsh Electronics Forum, awarding bodies, NTOs and industrial partners. Pontypridd College has also worked with a consortium of South Wales-based construction companies to address the shortage of construction professionals. The project has been part-funded by the European Social Fund.

5. Ystrad Mynach College, together with Barry College, successfully bid for funding for a joint FEFCW Efl project to develop training for the aerospace industry to address skills shortages. £46,000 from Strand 2 has been allocated to this project. The FEFCW has made a provisional Efl allocation of £57,7000 to the college, which responds to the South Wales Aircraft Group’s promotion campaign to recruit students for the aircraft repair industry. Ystrad Mynach College has set up a centralised business unit to develop links with local business, facilitate a coherent approach to needs analysis and deliver tailored training to local business. The college has been involved in writing the *South East Wales Action Plan for Skills*, a consultation document produced for SE Wales TEC.

ANNEX C

HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISION

PERCENTAGE OF ENTRANTS FROM LOW PARTICIPATION NEIGHBOURHOODS: 1997/98

	University of Glamorgan	University of Wales College, Newport	University of Wales, Swansea	Swansea Institute of Higher Education
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Young full-time undergraduate entrants	23	26	13	20
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants (without previous experience of higher education)	24	22	20	16
Part-time undergraduates – Young entrants (without previous experience of higher education)	30	36	11	24
Part-time undergraduates – Mature entrants (without previous experience of higher education)	27	15	16	14

Source: Performance indicators in higher education, 1996-97, 1997-98,

Joint Funding Councils' publication, December 1999

Part-time provision

1. University of Glamorgan and UWC Newport are substantial providers of part-time provision. In 1998/99 for example, Glamorgan had 5,700 part-time students as against 8,900 full-time students, and Newport 3,600 part-time students and 2,600 full-time students. Within their part-time activity, they are also major players in franchising higher education provision to further education colleges across Wales (that is, while the higher education institution has ultimate responsibility, the course itself is taught in the further education college). Thus, in 1998/99 the University of Glamorgan had some 750 part-time franchised students in further education colleges in the South Wales Valleys and Newport around 430 students. Part-time opportunities are vital in providing locally-available opportunities for study. One of the particular advantages which franchise provision can have is that taking a course at a further education college on your doorstep can be much less intimidating as a first step into higher education than attending a larger or less familiar higher education institution further away.

Community University of the Valleys Programme

2. The Community University of the Valleys programme, a partnership between UW Swansea, U Glamorgan, the Open University, and, more recently, UWC Newport, provides adult educational

opportunities within local valley communities. In UW Swansea the scheme has enabled a number of people from the Swansea Valleys to gain full honours degrees on a part-time basis. Glamorgan operates in Rhondda, Cynon and Rhymney Valleys, and Newport is taking access and higher education taster courses into the eastern valleys, including the establishment of a satellite centre in Tredegar. These kinds of activities are closely linked to the programmes of continuing education offered by institutions.

Widening access - South Wales Valleys

3. Over the past four years, the Council has funded seven institutions in Wales, including U Glamorgan and UW Swansea, for what is described as "non-award-bearing, non-vocational continuing education". These are courses for which there is no formal assessment, often one of the aspects which puts off those who have been disillusioned or disaffected from traditional, qualification-based education, or lack the confidence to participate in such assessment. Much of this provision is targeted at communities which are socially or economically disadvantaged or at groups where participation in higher education is low. They provide a means to engage interest in higher education, promote its opportunities and to build the necessary confidence for people to proceed to mainstream higher education and training. In 1998/99 Glamorgan delivered over 20,000 contact hours and Swansea over 70,000 contact hours to students on these programmes. From next year the Council expects to move to a policy of allocation of widening access funding (totalling £1.5m a year) to all Welsh institutions to provide targeted programmes designed to increase participation by under-represented groups.

Admission Scheme

4. Admissions schemes directed both at young people (for example, guaranteed admission providing minimum entrance requirements are met) and mature entrants (for example, acceptance of non-traditional qualifications), together with targeted marketing aimed at lower socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities, are also features of widening access schemes operated by institutions within the South Wales valleys area. Institutions are increasingly entering into compact arrangements with schools or tertiary colleges in deprived areas where the university promotes higher education to pupils and stimulates their interest, offering visits to the university, taster sessions, etc, together with guaranteed course places provided the pupil keeps to their side of the compact in terms of attendance and course work, etc. Glamorgan has a substantial programme of such activities and University of Wales Swansea also operates a number of compact schemes. During 1999/2000 and 2000/01, the HEFCW is providing £500,000 to Welsh higher education institutions, including a total of £196,000 to Glamorgan and UW Swansea to expand their programmes and £60,000 to Newport to establish compacts with a number of schools in deprived areas. This includes Torfaen, one of the areas which the Council's survey referred to above revealed as having particularly low participation rates.