



Involving, inspiring and empowering the next generation

Paula Griffiths, Partnership Manager, Reaching Wider

Background and context

Reaching Wider is a pan-Wales collaborative programme with universities, colleges and schools working together to improve social mobility by widening access to all forms of higher education (HE).

The aim of this national programme, funded by Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, is to increase HE participation from under-represented groups, by broadening educational aspirations and skills, and creating innovative study opportunities and learning pathways.

There are three Reaching Wider partnerships, each led by a lead institutional partner: South West Wales is led by Swansea University, South East Wales by the University of South Wales, and North & Mid Wales by Bangor University.

Access and equity: a core mission

Reaching Wider's mission is that every child and young person should have the opportunity to consider HE, regardless of their background. Many learners, especially those from under-represented communities, may feel that university is out of reach due to financial concerns, lack of family experience of HE, or limited exposure to the pathways available. Our work focuses on addressing these challenges by providing clear guidance, hands-on experiences, and tailored support to help children and young people see that HE is a viable option for them.

Reaching Wider priority groups, as identified by Medr,¹ are based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD):

- young people & adults living in the bottom-two quintiles of the WIMD
- care-experienced learners of all ages and carers (regardless of the WIMD).

Within the lowest two WIMD quintiles, the programme further prioritises:

- people with disabilities
- people from ethnic minority backgrounds
- Welsh-medium learning, including supporting second-language learning and Welsh cultures.

¹ HEFCW (2021) [Reaching Wider Programme guidance](#),

Engagement activities

Reaching Wider engages and inspires children and young people through a wide variety of hands-on experiences.

- **University and college campus visits & taster sessions**
Allowing young people to experience college and university first-hand
- **Information, Advice and Guidance sessions**
Helping learners make informed choices about their education and careers
- **Creative and subject-specific workshops**
Providing insight into different courses and career pathways. Encouraging exploration of a wide range of subjects
- **Reaching Wider National Mentoring Programme**
Connecting young learners with relatable role models, to demystify HE and help them to be better informed and more prepared in taking their next steps including navigation of UCAS and student finance processes and study skills development.

Breaking down barriers to success

Reaching Wider actively works with identified priority schools, youth organisations and community groups to ensure that students from all backgrounds, including young carers, care-experienced students, BAME learners and those with disabilities are given the support they need to succeed.

Our targeted outreach supports learners aged 10 and above by:

Raising educational aspirations

Empowering students to believe in their potential

Providing guidance and information

Helping learners explore all available pathways

Promoting the Welsh language and culture

Promoting the importance of Welsh within careers and encouraging second language Welsh learners

Supporting transition

Helping students at key transition points such as primary to secondary, secondary to FE, FE to HE.

Developing and enhancing skills

Strengthening both new and existing talents and abilities

Inspiring and motivating

Encouraging learners to explore future careers and opportunities

Impact and Outcomes

Through the Reaching Wider programme we aim to work with the same under-represented learners throughout their journey from school to HE. Statistics for engagement therefore include a combination of young people who may have participated in a few activities alongside others with whom we have engaged over a longer period. A snapshot of all-Wales Reaching Wider delivery for 2023-24 demonstrates the large volume of people who benefit from our programme.

- ❖ 17,570 children, young people & adults took part in Reaching Wider activities
- ❖ 95,570 hours of engagement
- ❖ 70% of people with which we engaged fell into the Reaching Wider eligibility criteria
- ❖ 40% of participants received over 6 hours engagement.

“As a teacher, I feel the event was perfectly pitched at students of this age - it certainly provided challenge, yet the organisation and well-thought-out structure of the day meant that students could remain engaged and that even the more difficult aspects were accessible. The resources are entirely appropriate and can now be used within the school!”

Teacher

“Thanks to your assistance, 60 of our pupils were able to attend the recent university welcome event and enjoy a valuable experience exploring the campus. Our school is situated in one of the most deprived areas in Wales. It is vital that children from such communities are supported in every possible way to raise their aspirations and help them access further and higher education. Your support for this visit has not only provided a memorable day for our pupils but has also played an important part in encouraging them to see university as a place where they belong.”

Chair of Governors

“The experiences I've had today are incredible and really interesting and I enjoyed learning what you do as a student. I would really like to go to uni now.”

Secondary school pupil

Looking ahead: a future of opportunity

Reaching Wider is committed to making education truly inclusive. By continuing to develop our mentoring programme and expanding our outreach work, we aim to create a lasting impact on young people's lives, helping them unlock opportunities that may have once seemed beyond their reach.

Together, we are involving, inspiring, and empowering the next generation to achieve their goals and access the education they deserve.

For more information, go to: www.reachingwider.ac.uk/en/

This case study has been produced and shared as part of the Medr-funded QAA Cymru project: Enabling learner progression into and within higher education .

Find out more about the project on the QAA Cymru [website](#).

