

National Assembly for Wales
Finance Committee

Higher Education Funding

May 2014



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

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Finance Committee

The Committee was established on 22 June 2011. The Finance Committee's role is to carry out the functions set out in Standing Order 19. This includes consideration of the use of resources by the Assembly Commission or Welsh Ministers, and in particular reporting during the annual budget round. The Committee may also consider any other matter relating to expenditure from the Welsh Consolidated Fund.

Current Committee membership



Jocelyn Davies (Chair)
Plaid Cymru
South Wales East



Peter Black
Welsh Liberal Democrats
South Wales West



Christine Chapman
Welsh Labour
Cynon Valley



Paul Davies
Welsh Conservatives
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Mike Hedges
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Swansea East



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Welsh Labour
Vale of Clwyd



Julie Morgan
Welsh Labour
Cardiff North

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry:



Simon Thomas
Plaid Cymru
Mid and West Wales

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Chairs foreword

As a Committee we have found this inquiry to be particularly interesting; we received a breadth of evidence from various sources including students, bodies representing students and higher education institutions. For this inquiry we also undertook a web-chat with students, this proved to be a really useful tool for gathering evidence.

One area which was of great interest to the Committee was the factors which affect a student's higher education decision. We found that often the cost of living impacted on a student's choice and some students have to work full time hours, whilst studying full time to fund their education.

Another area which surprised the Committee was the amount of money that higher education institutions are spending on attracting overseas students. Whilst Members fully understand the benefits of having overseas students studying at Welsh institutions, we do question whether some of this money could be used to attract Welsh students to study at Welsh institutions.

We are pleased that the Minister has announced a review of higher education funding, and we hope this review will address some of the issues raised in this report.

I would like to thank everyone who gave evidence to this inquiry.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government works with HEFCW and the higher education institutions to closely monitor, identify and assess the implications of any changes to trends in the numbers of international students; of policy changes in England, and any changes in the numbers of new applications for Welsh universities. (Page 18)

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government should continue to carefully monitor funding for the higher education sector until the Review publishes its first interim report and report regularly to the National Assembly for Wales, (as part of the Draft Budget narrative), on changes that may impact on higher education funding for example changes to cross-border flows of students; number of overseas students; policy changes in England etc. (Page 18)

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should look closely at the impact of policy decisions made in England, including after the UK election in 2015, and particularly the extent to which English universities are attracting Welsh domiciled students who:

- attract additional funding under “widening access” policies;
- achieve high A’ level grades for example ABB; or
- unable to find a relevant course in a Welsh HE institution.

(Page 19)

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government review how they can support Welsh institutions which are close to the border to compete effectively with English institutions for example reviewing local competition for specific courses; funding for capital projects etc. (Page 19)

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government commission more detailed modelling on overall student debt and the student loan book to estimate the long term implications of student debt. (Page 23)

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government explore the options for being involved in further developments of the Department for Business and Skills HERO model

which is used to model student loan repayments and whether adjustments can be made to take account of Welsh Government student finance policies. (Page 23)

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government investigate if:

- there is evidence that increasing numbers of graduates either do not need to repay their student loans because they do not meet the minimum earnings threshold requirements to do so or are failing to repay the loans for other reasons,
 - drop-out rates of students before completing their courses is increasing'
- (Page 23)

Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government should increase awareness of the tuition fee grant at an earlier stage (at the latest year 9) in students' education. As well as ensuring consistency in how awareness is raised. (Page 26)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government monitor the number of students who live at home while studying to see if there is an increasing trend. (Page 26)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends the Welsh Government commission research into whether living costs are more of a concern than tuition fee costs to students. (Page 26)

Recommendation 11. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, with HEFCW, should monitor how much money is spent on widening access initiatives and monitor whether this money represents value for money and is achieving its aim of supporting students from lower income households. (Page 29)

Recommendation 12. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, with HEFCW, should monitor the number of part-time higher education students in Wales to ascertain any changes in trends. Alongside this, the Committee recommends that a clear interim strategic policy direction is set for part-time higher education up to at least the academic year 2016/17. (Page 32)

Recommendation 13. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, with HEFCW, implement a holistic, strategic funding package for part-time study and for the Open University, at least for

academic years 2014/15 and 2015/16, as an interim strategy until Professor Sir Ian Diamond's review completes its work. (Page 32)

Recommendation 14. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should work with HEFCW to ensure that every higher education institution in Wales receives a small, minimum level of research funding, for example £500,000, if they are not entitled to any further funding under the "sustainable research excellence" formula. (Page 35)

Recommendation 15. The Committee recommends that a review is undertaken of post-graduate provision, including funding. (Page 35)

Recommendation 16. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government and HEFCW should monitor the impact of the current fees/loans funding regime on the number of students studying expensive subjects in Wales and monitor the quality of provision of expensive subjects. (Page 37)

Recommendation 17. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should evaluate the progress and value for money of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. (Page 38)

Recommendation 18. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government investigate whether the overall number of students studying in the medium of Welsh is increasing or decreasing, and if necessary, investigate;

- the reasons why the take-up of studying courses delivered in Welsh is not increasing;
 - the reasons students who have attended Welsh medium education do not all continue to study HE courses in Welsh;
- and agree an action plan with stakeholders to address any issues. (Page 39)

1. Overview

1. At its meeting on 6 March 2013, the Committee agreed to conduct an inquiry into to consider the funding of Higher Education Institutions (“HEIs”) in Wales, the financial impact of the Welsh Government’s tuition fee grant policy on HEIs and students in Wales, and whether the Welsh Government is delivering value for money in this area.

Terms of reference

2. As the new part time Higher Education (“HE”) funding policy does not come into effect until later in 2014 the Committee decided to initially focus this inquiry on full time HE funding. As a result of the consultation responses received the scope of the inquiry was widened to include part time HE funding.

3. The Committee’s terms of reference covered three broad income streams of HEI funding plus the role of finance in choices made by students:

- Research – How effective are HEIs in securing research income including Welsh Government funding of research via Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (“HEFCW”).
- Tuition fee income and support – What has been the financial effect of the new tuition fee policy introduced in 2012 which allows HEIs to charge students up to £9,000 per annum for HE courses and what are the financial implications of the Welsh Government’s tuition fee grant?
- Other income opportunities or threats – How important is the income stream to Welsh HEIs from tuition fees received from students domiciled outside Wales including overseas students and what are the financial consequences, now or in the future, of other changes in the HE marketplace including the entry of private providers?

Student choices – What financial considerations do students take into account when deciding whether to go into HE and what impact the WG’s tuition fee grants have on an individual’s choice?

Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales

4. On Tuesday 19 November 2013 the Minister announced that he was setting up a Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales, to be chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond and the review will be structured in two parts.¹

5. Professor Sir Ian Diamond will produce a factual summary of the evidence that the review team collect in autumn 2015. The final report, including final recommendations, will be issued by September 2016. The priorities for the review will include:

- widening access – ensuring that any future system has widening access at its core objective, is progressive and equitable;
- supporting the skill needs of Wales;
- strengthening part-time and postgraduate provision in Wales; and
- long-term financial sustainability.

Statistical Information in relation to Higher Education

6. On 24 April 2014 the Welsh Government published a Statistical Bulletin entitled Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Statistics 2013 Entry.² This bulletin analyses UCAS data relating to applicants accepted to full-time degree and HND courses in autumn 2013 at higher education institutes in the UK.³

Applicants to Welsh institutions

7. In the 2013 academic year, 25,511 applicants were accepted by Welsh institutions. This represents a 5.7% increase compared with 2012 and is in contrast to the 8.1% decrease in applications between 2011 and 2012.

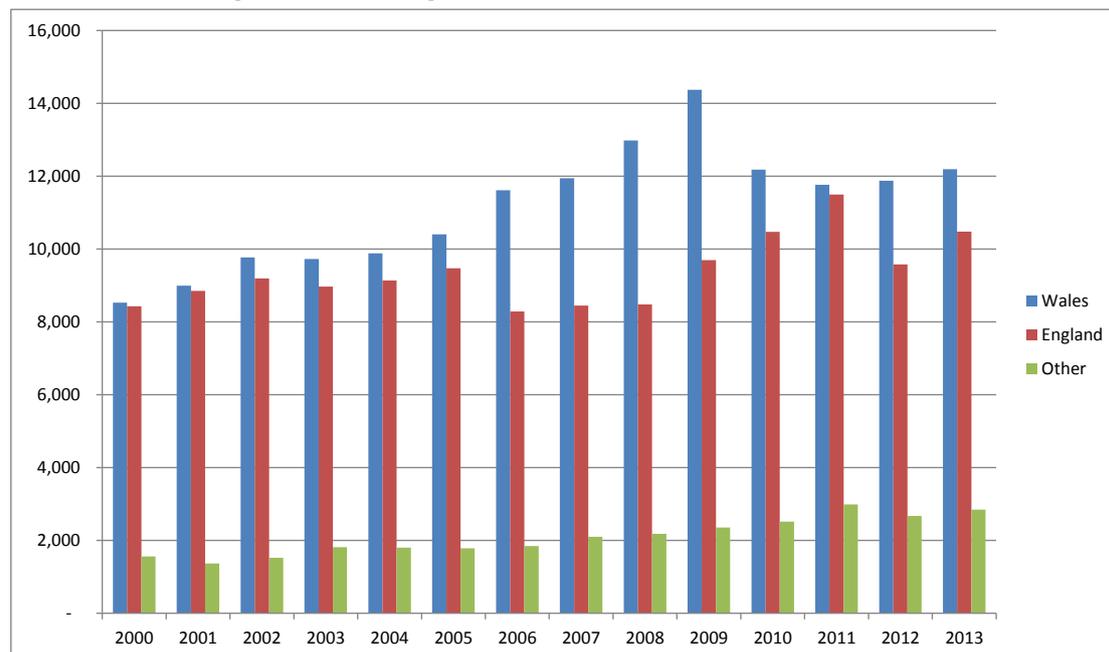
8. Just under half (47.8 per cent) of all applicants accepted by Welsh HEIs are Welsh domiciled students. This proportion is 1.4 percentage points lower than in 2012.

¹ Written Cabinet Statement, [Statement on the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales](#), 19 February 2014

² <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2014/140424-universities-colleges-admissions-service-statistics-2013-en.pdf> [accessed 1 May]

³ UCAS, [UCAS Undergraduate 2013 End of Cycle report, December 2013](#) [accessed 6 May 2014]

Figure 1: Applicants accepted to Welsh institutions by country of domicile and year of entry; 2000 – 2013

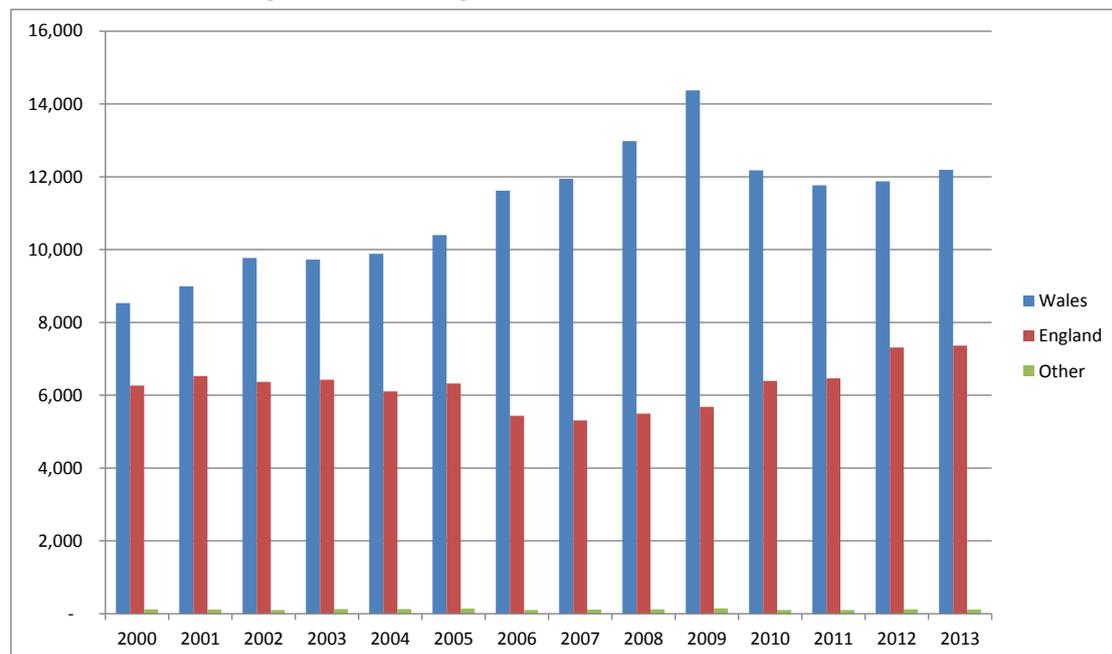


Source: Welsh Government, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Statistics 2013 Entry

Applications by Welsh domiciles

9. In 2013 there were 19,663 Welsh domiciled applicants accepted to UK institutions this represents an increase of 1.8% since 2012. 62% of Welsh domiciled students were accepted at Welsh institutions, the same percentage as in 2012.

Figure 2: Welsh domiciled applicants by country of accepting institution and year of entry; 2000 - 2013



Source: Welsh Government, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Statistics 2013 Entry ⁴

Individual institutions

10. Acceptance data at individual institution level can be accessed from the UCAS website for 2009/10 to 2013/14.⁵ This data reveals that Glyndŵr University saw the largest percentage increase in student numbers between 2012 and 2013, 31.5%. In contrast the University of South Wales (formerly University of Wales, Newport) saw a decrease of 14.9% in acceptances in the same period.

⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2014/140424-universities-colleges-admissions-service-statistics-2013-en.pdf> [accessed 1 May 2014]

⁵ UCAS, [Acceptances by institution, domicile group and entry year](#), December 2013 [accessed 5 May 2014]

Figure 3: Acceptances by Welsh institutions by entry year; 2009 to 2013

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Percentage change between 2012/13 and 2013/14
Aberystwyth University	2,935	2,820	3,310	2,710	2,520	-7.0
Bangor University	2,745	2,445	2,415	2,355	2,395	1.7
Cardiff University	5,330	5,000	5,345	5,565	6,035	8.4
Cardiff Metropolitan University (UWIC)	2,635	2,595	2,840	2,670	2,895	8.4
Glyndwr University	.	.	935	730	960	31.5
University of South Wales (formerly University of Wales, Newport)	1,415	1,530	1,445	1,140	970	-14.9
Swansea University	3,525	3,380	3,470	2,845	3,590	26.2
Swansea Metropolitan (UWTSD)	1,530	1,245	1,480	1,405	1,280	-8.9
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	610	595	1,155	820	770	-6.1

Source: UCAS, [Acceptances by institution, domicile group and entry year](#), December 2013 [as of 5 May 2014] data not available

2. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales funding

11. In March 2013, HEFCW published the funding allocations for the academic year 2013/14 which is the second year of transition to the new student fees and finance system. HEFCW will allocate £382 million (an increase of 6.5 per cent over 2012/13) of funding for HE in the 2013/14 academic year made up of:⁶

- An estimated £117 million in fee grant payments to HE institutions in Wales;
- £71 million for quality research (“QR”);
- £48 million for full-time undergraduate and PGCE provision through the “Public Investment Fund” for example for access and retention, Welsh medium and disabled students and students in subject priority areas;
- £46 million for part-time provision and postgraduate taught provision;
- £5 million for postgraduate research;
- £39 million for strategic and initiative allocations; and
- £6 million for innovation and engagement.⁷

12. HEFCW estimates that it will make around £50 million in fee grant payments to HE institutions in the rest of the UK for Welsh domiciled students who study outside Wales.

13. HEFCW also estimates that universities in Wales will receive approximately £87 million for additional tuition fees paid by students from the rest of the UK. These monies will not be paid through HEFCW and is not included in the HEFCW funding of £382 million for 2013/14.⁸

14. On 21 November 2013 the Wales Audit Office published its value for money study into financial planning and management in the higher education sector. The report concludes that:

⁶ HEFCW Press Release, [Funding for higher education in 2013/14](#), 10 April 2013

⁷ HEFCW Press release, [Funding for higher education in 2013/14, 10 April 2013, page 5](#) [accessed 15 April 2013]

⁸ Written Evidence, FIN(4)HEF07

“The finances of Welsh higher education institutions are generally in sound health and, overall, both the Welsh Government and Higher Education Funding Council have implemented policy around raising tuition fees effectively (...) the Welsh Government could have done more to appraise policy options around tuition fees in late 2010, before putting the current arrangements in place from the start of the 2012/13 academic year, and that estimated costs have increased since the time the policy was announced.”⁹

15. The WAO report states that the Welsh Government responded quickly to the UK Government’s decision to establish higher tuition fees in England however its appraisal of policy options and potential to consider changes to their assumptions were limited. The report highlights that the cost of the Tuition Fee Grant for 2012-12 to 2016-17 is now predicted to be higher than forecast in November 2010, increasing by 24 per cent from £653 million to £809 million.

16. Members heard evidence from Cardiff University that there had been a funding shortfall whilst students on the new funding regime (i.e. higher tuition fees) worked their way through the system.¹⁰

17. However the universities who gave evidence at Committee agreed with HEFCW’s forecasts, that overall funding for the higher education sector in Wales was increasing, following a fall in 2012/13, mainly as a result of an increase in the number of English domiciled students coming to study at Welsh universities.¹¹ Members also heard that “there are winners and losers” within the sector, with some institutions faring better than others.¹²

18. In written evidence from universities, it was emphasised that the current funding model causes increased uncertainty over the income for each individual institution as funding is dependent on the number of students that they recruit each year. It was also noted that funding

⁹ Wales Audit Office, [Press Release - Welsh higher education finances in ‘sound health’ and tuition fees policy well implemented](#), 21 November 2013 [accessed 21 November 2013]

¹⁰ Written Evidence, FIN(4)HEF06

¹¹ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraphs 168, 170

¹² RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 168

was based on student fees (usually funded by student loans/debt) rather than government grant.¹³

19. Committee Members were not surprised to hear that Welsh universities would prefer Welsh Government funding to prioritise the higher education sector in Wales, rather than support English universities as a result of student choice and tuition fee grant payments. However the institutions recognise that it is a “grey area”. Professor Michael Scott of Glyndwr University said:

“I want to come back to this whole business of Welsh students, really, and the money following the students and going into the universities. We want Welsh students to come to Welsh universities and we want them to be proud of going to Welsh universities. Therefore, the universities have to be financed correctly... If we can find an incentive whereby Welsh students are encouraged to go to Welsh universities, which might bring more money into Welsh universities and allow a greater capital investment, for example, then that will start the ball rolling over a period of time. If you have an incentive at the moment that Welsh students are going into English universities that have more money and more realisation in terms of capital, you are just going to get a decline in the way in which Welsh universities are perceived

“I do not want to get into a long-term situation whereby we are disadvantaging Welsh students from having an experience outside of Wales, because that is not what we want Wales to be; we want Wales to look outwards. However, we have to accept a situation whereby there is certain underfunding. There is a funding gap between us and England, between our universities—whether it be Cardiff or Glyndwr, and universities across the border. One thing, for the moment, that we could look at would be to say, ‘Okay, if you are going to a Welsh university, you will be funded; if you are going to an English university, you will not be funded, or you will only be funded by 10% or 20%, or whatever’, just to try to equal it out, so that we can build up the reputation of all of the universities in Wales for

¹³ Written Evidence, FIN(4)HEF01, FIN(4)HEF03, FIN(4)HEF06

what we do and for the missions that we do. That is what we have to do.”¹⁴

Minister’s evidence

20. The Minister told the Committee that the current funding policy is sustainable and fully funded, not just for the current Assembly but until at least 2020.¹⁵

21. The Minister said that the funding situation for higher education was closely monitored by regular meetings of an expert group and that the costs and long term sustainability of the policy are kept under regular review. The cross-border flows of students are monitored to identify any emerging trends and any potential impact on income for the sector.¹⁶

22. The Minister told the Committee that the review will report after the 2016 Assembly elections due to the complex and rapidly changing nature of HE. He also highlighted there could be policy changes in HE policy in England following the 2015 general election. The Minister stated that he hoped this review will ‘see us through a generation’ in terms of how HE funding is configured.¹⁷

Committee view

23. Whilst it was agreed that overall levels of funding are increasing, the Committee notes the evidence that the current funding regime did have some unintended consequences:

- there is increased competition between Welsh and English universities, particularly those who are close to the border for example Glyndwr and Chester, for Welsh domiciled students;
- that the number of Welsh domiciled students attending Welsh universities had been decreasing (although the latest figures show a slight increase);¹⁸
- the number of English domiciled students applying to study in Wales continues to increase.¹⁹

¹⁴ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 293

¹⁵ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 55

¹⁶ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 18

¹⁷ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 55

¹⁸ Written Evidence, FIN(4)-01-14(ptn3), 22 January 2014

¹⁹ Written Evidence, UCAS, [Deadline Applicant Statistics: January 2014](#)

24. The Committee recognises that the higher education sector is experiencing a period of significant change. Although the structural changes are now largely complete, there is increased competition from private and overseas providers of higher education; increasing competition from massive open online courses; changing trends in overseas students, sometimes dependent on UK visa criteria; and a *Higher Education Wales Bill* expected later in 2014, which will address, amongst other issues, the effectiveness of fee plans in securing the Welsh Government's strategic priorities.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government works with HEFCW and the higher education institutions to closely monitor, identify and assess the implications of any changes to trends in the numbers of international students; of policy changes in England, and any changes in the numbers of new applications for Welsh universities.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government should continue to carefully monitor funding for the higher education sector until the Review publishes its first interim report and report regularly to the National Assembly for Wales, (as part of the Draft Budget narrative), on changes that may impact on higher education funding for example changes to cross-border flows of students; number of overseas students; policy changes in England etc.

3. Higher Education policies in England

25. In evidence Glyndwr University said that capital funding for Welsh Universities needed to be looked at in more detail and that they often found themselves at a disadvantage compared to English universities.²⁰

26. Professor Patricia Price of Cardiff University said:

“Our experience so far is that they are competing increasingly for the widening access and participation groups, and targeting those groups that we may also wish to encourage to stay in Wales to go across the border.”

Minister’s evidence

27. The Minister was unconcerned about the funding implications of increasing numbers of Welsh students studying at English universities because Wales is a net importer of students.²¹

Committee view

28. Committee Members’ views were more divided on this issue. Members noted that fees in England are generally higher than fees in Wales and this has some cost implications for the Welsh Government.

29. Members also noted from the web-chats that many students are choosing to study near to home so that they can continue with existing part-time jobs or keep the costs lower by living at home.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should look closely at the impact of policy decisions made in England, including after the UK election in 2015, and particularly the extent to which English universities are attracting Welsh domiciled students who:

- attract additional funding under “widening access” policies;
- achieve high A’ level grades for example ABB; or
- are unable to find a relevant course in a Welsh HE institution.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government review how they can support Welsh institutions which are close to the border to complete effectively with English institutions for

²⁰ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 199

²¹ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 111

example reviewing local competition for specific courses; funding for capital projects etc.

4. Student Loan Book

30. The National Audit Office (“NAO”) published a report *Student loan repayments*²² in November 2013 which states that forecasts from the Department for Business and Skills (“BIS”) show the total value of outstanding student loans in England will increase from £46 billion in 2013 to around £200 billion by 2042 (in 2013 prices). The report only covers English loans and concludes that BIS need to improve their systems and strategy for achieving a higher rate of loan repayment. The NAO state that BIS expect 35% of new loans not to be repaid and estimate that 50% of borrowers with new student loans will not repay them in full.²³

31. More recently the Institute for Fiscal Studies (“IFS”) published a report on 24 April 2014 entitled [Estimating the public cost of student loans](#).²⁴ This report investigates English full-time undergraduates who started university in 2012 and concludes that for every £1 of loans issued the long run cost to the UK government will be 43.3p. The report explains that this is due to some students not paying their loans back in full and that loans are offered at an interest rate below the UK government’s long run cost of borrowing.

32. The Welsh Government is responsible for loans issued to Welsh domiciled students from 1998-99 onwards, although student finance was only devolved to the Welsh Government in 2006. The *Welsh Government’s Consolidated Accounts 2012-13*²⁵ explain in detail how the student loans are treated for accounting purposes. Further detail is provided in the document regarding student loan write-offs, the financial modelling used, the impact of the assumptions used and the overall level of student debt.

33. The Wales Audit Office report on *Higher Education finances* published in November 2013 discusses the statistical modelling used by the Welsh Government to calculate the value of the annual loan policy write-off charge. This report states that in Wales:

²² National Audit Office, [Student loan repayments](#), 28 November 2013

²³ National Audit Office, [Student loan repayments](#), 28 November 2013, page 4, [accessed 5 February 2014]

²⁴ <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r94.pdf> [accessed 1 May 2014]

²⁵ Welsh Government, [Consolidated Accounts 2012-13](#), 20 August 2013, [Accessed 5 February 2014]

“The estimated cost of issuing student loans over the period 2012-13 to 2016-17 remains unchanged at just over £1.6 billion and, although subject to change, loan policy write-off charges are currently expected to be £476 million compared with an original forecast of £549 million.”²⁶

34. The report states that the Welsh Government recognises that the new HERO model it is adopting to model student loan repayments is flawed.²⁷

35. With regard to the repayment of loans a student from the first web chat said that they were aware of other students who have taken out a student loan and are avoiding paying it back, an Aberystwyth University science student said:

“The loan should have to stay with someone for life until it is paid off in order to ensure the Welsh economy does not suffer from their investment.”²⁸

36. Another student from the second web chat explained that there should be more information about the repayment system for loans as they were not clear of the current terms and conditions.²⁹

Minister’s evidence

37. The Minister said he believes the overall level of student debt is being maintained and managed at a realistic level in Wales.³⁰ The Minister acknowledged that more work needs to be undertaken on modelling future debt with Professor Sir Ian Diamond’s review considering the long term implications of this issue.

38. When asked whether there was ‘headroom’ in the Welsh loan book, the Minister responded:

“I have not asked officials as yet to undertake modelling in that regard, although you are right to point to it as something that we will need to do. It will be of enormous interest. At present,

²⁶ Wales Audit Office, [Higher Education Finances](#), 21 November 2013, page 33, [Accessed 4 December 2013]

²⁷ Wales Audit Office, [Higher Education Finances Report](#), 21 November 2013, paragraph 2.15

²⁸ Finance Committee Web-Chat Transcript, 21 November 2013, page 9

²⁹ Finance Committee Web-Chat Transcript, 21 November 2013, page 21

³⁰ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 24

that overall package of debt in Wales is miniscule compared to the situation across the border in England, but we need to take a long-term view.”³¹

Committee view

39. The Committee expressed concerns over the rising level of student debt, also known as the student loan book and whether this is sustainable in the longer term.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government commission more detailed modelling on overall student debt and the student loan book to estimate the long term implications of student debt.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government explore the options for being involved in further developments of the Department for Business and Skills HERO model which is used to model student loan repayments and whether adjustments can be made to take account of Welsh Government student finance policies.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government investigate if:

- there is evidence that increasing numbers of graduates either do not need to repay their student loans because they do not meet the minimum earnings threshold requirements to do so or are failing to repay the loans for other reasons;**
- drop-out rates of students before completing their courses is increasing**

³¹ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 26

5. Impact on student and student choices

40. The Committee heard mixed views on whether students were aware of what funding is available to them. The results of the survey³² to prospective and current students showed high levels of awareness whereas the web chats³³ revealed students had all had different experiences in the way they were informed about the tuition fee grant.

Awareness of the tuition fee grant

41. Students from the web chats all had different experiences of how they had received information about the tuition fee grant. Several were informed at school or sixth form, some received presentations from Student Finance and others had to find out about support themselves and received incorrect information from their local authority. Some students also explained that they only found out about the support available when they were completing their UCAS applications and this was by word of mouth. One Aberystwyth University arts student explained:

“I think the problem with the access to information as I understand it is that everything to do with applying for grants extra is going to be centralised – this means that it becomes impersonal – I am lucky that our local office has some fantastic staff with better knowledge than the main student finance office who often gave conflicting advice.”³⁴

42. Students from both web chats felt that more information and advice should be made available to prospective students.

Working while studying

43. All five students in the first web chat stated that they are working whilst studying. One Cardiff University science student stated they are working full time and studying full time:

“I’m in uni 9-5 every day then having to go to work until 1-2am to try and earn enough money to pay for it so I am constantly

³² Finance Committee, Summary of Higher Education Funding Survey

³³ Finance Committee, Web-Chat with Students, 21 November 2013, page 4

³⁴ Finance Committee, Web-Chat with Students, 21 November 2013, page 4

exhausted and it is definitely affecting how much study I can do.”³⁵

Living at home while studying

44. From the first web chat several students stated that staying at home or close to home was an important consideration when choosing which university to study at due to the cost of living and the importance of keeping jobs they already had. Three of the students said that they live at home with the other two living in a shared house and on campus. The two students that don't live at home travel home most weekends to work. An Aberystwyth University science student said:

“I have a job near my home town, although it means travelling far, I end up earning money to use during the week at uni, unfortunately there are not many jobs near my university, and my job at home gets very busy during the summer, winter and Easter breaks, which means I will earn good money during those holidays.”³⁶

45. On 28 April 2013 NUS Wales published a report [Pound in Your Pocket, Wales 2014](#)³⁷ which surveyed nearly 2,000 students and found that the cost of living has a significant impact on students in addition to paying for tuition fees.

Minister's evidence

46. Regarding the tuition fee grant, the Minister stated that take up of the grant was ‘between 95% and 98%’.³⁸ When asked whether there was a benefit in making students aware earlier of the financial assistance available to them, he confirmed it would be looked at as part of the review, but also confirmed that work is taking place to work with young people.³⁹

47. With regards to questions on the concerns raised by students on the living costs whilst studying the Minister said

³⁵ Finance Committee, Web-Chat with Students, 21 November 2013, page 3

³⁶ Finance Committee, Web-Chat with Students, 21 November 2013, page 6

³⁷ www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/News/6156/NUS_poundinyourpocket_report-English.pdf [accessed 1 May 2014]

³⁸ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December, paragraph 119

³⁹ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December, paragraph 122

“That is why I think it is more important than ever that we continue with a governmental commitment to supporting our students through the overall financial burden of higher education. There is even more reason to be determined about a policy such as this than there would have been in better times.”⁴⁰

48. The Minister confirmed many of the issues raised by students in the course of this inquiry would be looked at by the review.⁴¹

Committee view

49. The Committee notes the evidence and felt particularly strongly that the evidence offered by students during the webchat indicated that there is inconsistencies in the information available to students and that many students have to spend excessive time working to fund their studies.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government should increase awareness of the tuition fee grant at an earlier stage (at the latest year 9) in students’ education. As well as ensuring consistency in how awareness is raised.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government monitor the number of students who live at home while studying to see if there is an increasing trend.

The Committee recommends the Welsh Government commission research into whether living costs are more of a concern than tuition fee costs to students.

⁴⁰ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December, paragraph 127

⁴¹ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December, paragraph 129-144

6. Widening Access

50. Cardiff University's evidence states that in their experience the Tuition Fee Grant provides a strong incentive to those from lower income families.⁴²

51. However, Glyndŵr University indicated that it is too early to state with certainty the impact on socially disadvantaged groups. They said that people from deprived areas may be deterred from applying due to the fear of getting into debt and also stated the gap appears to be widening between participation rates.⁴³

52. Glyndŵr University also said that their institution's funding from HEFCW was adversely affected because they set a low level of tuition fees:

"If you look at the sector as a whole, that is probably true, but I think that there are winners and losers within the sector. As Professor Scott has already alluded to, because we set our tuition fee initially quite low, we did not fare so well. We have had a policy of gently increases over the intervening period. So, in one sense, we are playing catch-up, but we are very conscious of the market that we are particularly attracting."⁴⁴

53. Cardiff University said that the strain on the Funding Council's remaining grant has been such that they had seen the widening access and innovation and engagement moneys halved in this year, and they will disappear next year.

54. HEFCW explain in their written response that HESA data from 2011/12 shows Welsh domiciled students from lowest income households (using Communities First areas as a definition) are less likely to go to HEIs outside of Wales compared to all Welsh domiciled students.⁴⁵

55. Higher Education Wales ("HEW") argue in their written response that to date there is little evidence to show that full time students from lower income households or other widening access groups have been

⁴² Written Evidence, FIN(4)HEF06

⁴³ Written Evidence, FIN(4)-20-13 (Paper 5), 13 November 2013

⁴⁴ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 168

⁴⁵ Written Evidence, FIN(4)HEF07

affected by higher tuition fees with or without the tuition fee grant support.⁴⁶

56. Cardiff University said that they are concerned that perceptions around student debt might deter some students from widening participation backgrounds from continuing into postgraduate study. Cardiff University are looking at means-tested bursaries as a possible solution to this unintended consequence of increased student loans.⁴⁷

Minister's evidence

57. In the evidence the Minister stated that he was trying to obtain a complete picture of all the funding that supported the widening access policy:

“Thirty per cent of the money flowing through the student support system should be recycled into initiatives around widening access. That is a very chunky commitment that HEIs have to undertake. Since taking up my post, I have asked officials to grant me a better understanding of what is going on out there at the moment in terms of how the Reaching Wider programme is working, and also to grant me a better understanding of how we are monitoring the effectiveness of the spend of that kind of money. I have not had the full picture presented to me as yet...”⁴⁸

58. The Minister stated that widening access will be the overarching theme of the higher education review being chaired by Sir Ian Diamond and that he had not yet made a judgement on whether fee plans were an effective tool for widening access.

Committee view

59. The Committee notes there is conflicting evidence as to whether the Welsh Government's widening access was effective in achieving its aim of attracting students from lower income households into higher education, the Committee considers this to be a very important area.

60. The Committee recognises that some HEIs go to great efforts to attract overseas students, often spending millions of pounds on

⁴⁶ Written Response, FIN(4)-HEF04

⁴⁷ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 161

⁴⁸ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 161

attracting these students. Whilst the Committee doesn't doubt the importance of attracting overseas students, Members do question whether some of this money could be better spent attracting Welsh students.

61. The Committee was disappointed that information is not routinely collected on the A level grades obtained by students attending Welsh HEIs.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, with HEFCW, should monitor how much money is spent on widening access initiatives and monitor whether this money represents value for money and is achieving its aim of supporting students from lower income households.

7. Part-time study

Background

62. Leighton Andrews, former Minister for Education and Skills announced that from 2014/15 eligible students studying at an intensity of over 25% of a full-time course will be able to access a non-means tested loan from Student Finance Wales in order to cover the up-front costs of tuition fees for part-time courses. He also said that funding would be available to HEFCW to continue to subsidise the delivery costs of part-time courses in order to continue to fund part-time provision at broadly current levels. He said that he would expect higher education institutions to exercise restraint in the setting of part-time tuition fees.

Evidence

63. In the evidence Cardiff University and Glyndwr University stated that the number of part time students had fallen and Glyndwr University explained that they had increased the cost of their part time courses:

“We are very carefully raising our part-time fees. The other thing to be aware of, certainly for us, is that, in many instances, employers pay those fees, because we are linked very considerably with local employers. There is a certain reluctance on their part to fund fees above the present levels. Over the last 12 months, we have found that we have had fewer part-time students, but they have been studying a higher density of course at the higher fee. So, I do not believe that it is particularly following the Government ambitions in this area for part-time students.”⁴⁹

64. Several consultees, including the Open University, argued that part-time and postgraduate funding issues need to be considered alongside full-time undergraduate funding.⁵⁰

65. HEW highlight that in the past few years part time enrolment patterns have been on a downward trend and they suggest that there

⁴⁹ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 364

⁵⁰ Written Evidence, FIN(4)-HEF08

is an opportunity for Wales to adopt a different part-time policy to England to avoid a large reduction in part-time student numbers.⁵¹

66. The Open University argued that the changes being implemented in the part-time funding system in 2014 do not represent a final or settled arrangement for the future funding of part-time HE in Wales. They also stated that there are further developments that are in the process of being implemented, such as the removal of HEFCW institutional strategy funding, which will impact upon the ability of institutions to deliver part-time HE in priority areas.⁵²

67. The Wales Audit Office agreed in their report that further action is needed on funding for part-time study.⁵³

Minister's evidence

68. In the evidence the Minister stated that HEFCW and individual HEIs had a 'moral obligation'⁵⁴ to support part-time study in Wales. The Minister said:

"I think that part-time provision is very important to the way that Welsh society is configured and what our economy needs. Postgraduate provision is, I think, a ticking time bomb across the UK, in terms of students now coming out of undergraduate study with a parcel of debt and potentially being completely demotivated or unable to go forward with postgraduate study because of affordability issues. These are the most highly skilled people of all—people who we will need if the Welsh economy is to keep ticking. We need to understand how we make sure that affordability problems are not barriers to entry into postgraduate study in Wales. That is a tricky question."⁵⁵

Committee view

69. The Committee was concerned that funding for part-time study may be squeezed as a result of pressures on other budgets. Members felt that a decision, at least for the short-term, on part-time funding did not necessarily need to wait for Professor Sir Ian Diamond's higher education review to make their recommendations. Members felt that

⁵¹ Written Evidence, FIN(4)-HEF04

⁵² Written Evidence, FIN(4)-HEF08

⁵³ Wales Audit Office, [Higher Education Finances Report](#), 21 November 2013, page 35

⁵⁴ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 181

⁵⁵ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 76

the part-time higher education sector (both students and institutions) would benefit from a clear policy direction and funding, rather than leave it to individual institutions to see what funding was available once other courses and strategic priorities had been allocated funding.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, with HEFCW, should monitor the number of part-time higher education students in Wales to ascertain any changes in trends. Alongside this, the Committee recommends that a clear interim strategic policy direction is set for part-time higher education up to at least the academic year 2016/17.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, with HEFCW, implement a holistic, strategic funding package for part-time study and for the Open University, at least for academic years 2014/15 and 2015/16, as an interim strategy until Professor Sir Ian Diamond's review completes its work.

8. Research and post-graduate funding

Background

70. HEFCW currently has two main funding streams for research: around £70 million for quality research (“QR”) and £5 million for postgraduate research per annum. HEFCW also contributes to the funding for the Sêr Cymru initiative, which is much smaller in comparison, a total of £50 million over five years, of which 30% comes from the HEFCW budget.

Evidence

71. The Committee heard on several occasions that the institutions are very concerned that there will be “a squeeze” on the funds available for strategic priorities as more funding is through the tuition fees, rather than from HEFCW grants. Dr Blaney, HEFCW, described the difficult decisions that HEFCW have to discuss with the Welsh Government:

“The tuition fee grant is untouchable and if we want to maintain investment in the research base in Wales, and, as I said earlier, we are the biggest single investor, so it is important that we do, then we have to try to ring-fence that.”⁵⁶

72. Dr Blaney, HEFCW, continued:

“The current position is that we expect, next year, to be spending 60% of our total HEFCW resource on fee grant for full-time undergraduate students. Full-time undergraduate students are but one of the policy priorities for higher education that the Government has correctly set. If you look at things such as Welsh medium, widening access and research, there is a whole list of priorities, all of which are perfectly legitimate. With the exception of Welsh medium, they are the same across HE systems throughout the developed world, essentially. However, at the moment, we have our balance of resource predominantly focused on one of those areas. So, what I would wish to see coming out of the review is a consideration of the balance of

⁵⁶ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph 158

resources across that range of priorities and a shape of resourcing that better fits the shape of those priorities.”⁵⁷

73. As a research intensive university, Cardiff University currently receives around £40 million p.a. and Mr Davies emphasised the importance of this funding to Cardiff:

“Basically, that £40 million underpins—together with the tuition fee income, with a bit still coming from the funding council or from the student—the whole fabric of the university in terms of its academic staff, support staff and infrastructure. So, it is not additionality; it is core.”⁵⁸

74. HEFCW told the Committee that they currently allocate research funding based on a funding formula, based on “sustainable excellence” with two criteria: performance in the periodic research assessment exercises and a minimum threshold of three researchers in a unit of assessment.⁵⁹ Glyndŵr University is the only institution not to receive any research funding from HEFCW.⁶⁰

75. The Chief Scientific Officer evidence was unable to comment in detail on this but emphasised that the funding focus on “sustainable research excellence”⁶¹ was used in other parts of the UK as well as by HEFCW.

76. During the web chats the importance of support for postgraduate studies was identified as important by the students taking part. Students in the first web chat stated that a postgraduate degree is now needed to ‘set yourself apart’ from other students and they felt that funding should be available to support students studying for postgraduate qualifications.⁶²

77. Students in the second web chat indicated that in some subjects (e.g. architecture) employers expected students to have a postgraduate degree.

⁵⁷ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph 44

⁵⁸ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 322

⁵⁹ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph 102

⁶⁰ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph 108

⁶¹ Written Evidence, FIN(4)-02-14(ptn1), 5 February 2014

⁶² Finance Committee, Wed-Chat with Students, 21 November 2013, page 15

Minister's evidence

78. The Minister stated that postgraduate provision would be considered as part of the HE review.

“Postgraduate provision is, I think, a ticking time bomb across the UK, in terms of students now coming out of undergraduate study with a parcel of debt and potentially being completely demotivated or unable to go forward with postgraduate study because of affordability issues. These are the most highly skilled people of all—people who we will need if the Welsh economy is to keep ticking. We need to understand how we make sure that affordability problems are not barriers to entry into postgraduate study in Wales.”

Committee view

79. The Committee strongly believe that the area of research is vitally important to the Welsh institutions.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should work with HEFCW to ensure that every higher education institution in Wales receives a small, minimum level of research funding, for example £500,000, if they are not entitled to any further funding under the “sustainable research excellence” formula.

The Committee recommends that a review is undertaken of post-graduate provision, including funding.

9. Funding for Expensive subjects

80. In written evidence HEFCW explained that to date they been able to pay a premium for priority subjects (modern foreign languages and maths) and expensive subjects (science, technology, engineering, medicine, dentistry and conservatoire performance element) which have cost institutions more than £9,000 per student each year to deliver.⁶³

81. HEFCW indicated that institutions who provide expensive subjects are facing difficulties and HEFCW are trying to continue to provide an expensive subject premium however they state “our capacity to maintain this support is under pressure”.⁶⁴

82. In evidence HEFCW confirmed that the expensive subject premium is increasingly under threat.⁶⁵

83. HEW state in their evidence that under the new funding regime fee levels do not necessarily reflect the costs of different subjects which could lead to an increase in the provision of lower-cost subject areas. HEW believe that the lack of funding to support expensive subjects is an “area of significant concern”.⁶⁶

84. Cardiff University indicated that they believe there is a funding gap between English and Welsh HEIs in relation to the provision of high-cost subjects, with the provision of high-costs subjects “increasingly becoming a strain”.⁶⁷

85. HEFCW state that expensive subject funding is becoming increasingly under threat.⁶⁸

86. The Committee also heard views that it is easier for private providers “to pick off niche, low-cost subjects” and to leave higher cost subjects like science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the clinical subjects and conservatoire to be delivered by publicly funded institutions.

⁶³ Written Evidence, FIN(4)-HEF07

⁶⁴ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph

⁶⁵ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph

⁶⁶ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph

⁶⁷ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph

⁶⁸ RoP, Finance Committee, 27 November 2013, paragraph

Minister's evidence

87. The Minister said that funding for expensive subjects was an issue for individual HEIs and HEFCW.⁶⁹

Committee view

88. The Committee is concerned that money for premium subjects may be squeezed as a result of pressures on other budgets.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government and HEFCW should monitor the impact of the current fees/loans funding regime on the number of students studying expensive subjects in Wales and monitor the quality of provision of expensive subjects.

⁶⁹ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 192

10. Welsh medium provision

89. Glyndŵr University stated that they had seen an increase in the number of students studying through the medium of Welsh, which they had funded themselves.⁷⁰

90. Bangor University indicated that they had not seen a decrease in the number of students studying in the medium of Welsh adding that they had invested heavily in this element taking around half of all the Coleg Cymraeg investment in Wales.⁷¹

91. In contrast HEFCW stated in their evidence session that there had been an overall decline in the number of students studying through the medium of Welsh of around 250.

92. HEFCW provided additional evidence that states the figure of 258 represents a 5.6% reduction in numbers between 2008/09 and 2011/12 (the penultimate year of the target).⁷²

Minister's evidence

93. The Minister indicated that since Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol was set up in 2011, there has been a 10% increase in the types of courses being delivered in Welsh however there has not been a corresponding increase in take-up in the numbers of students.⁷³

Committee view

94. The Committee notes the efforts being put into teaching further education through the medium of Welsh, and applauds the steps being taken.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should evaluate the progress and value for money of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government investigate whether the overall number of students studying in

⁷⁰ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 369

⁷¹ RoP, Finance Committee, 13 November 2013, paragraph 371

⁷² Written Evidence, FIN(4)-01-14(ptn2), 22 January 2014

⁷³ RoP, Finance Committee, 11 December 2013, paragraph 45

the medium of Welsh is increasing or decreasing, and if necessary, investigate;

- the reasons why the take-up of studying courses delivered in Welsh is not increasing,**
 - the reasons students who have attended Welsh medium education do not all continue to study HE courses in Welsh,**
- and agree an action plan with stakeholders to address any issues.**

Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at

www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=1243.

Wednesday 12 June 2013

Leighton Andrews AM Minister for Education and Skills

Wednesday, 10 July 2013

Dr David Blaney Chief Executive, Higher Education
Funding Council for Wales

Celia Hunt Head of Skills, Education and Funding,
Higher Education Funding Council for
Wales

Bethan Owen Head of Institutional Engagement, Higher
Education Funding Council for Wales

Wednesday 13 November 2013

Professor Patricia Price Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience
and Academic Standards, Cardiff
University

Mike Davies Director of Finance, Cardiff University

Professor Michael Scott Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive,
Glyndŵr University

Paul Whiting Director of Finance, Glyndŵr University

Andrew Parry Head of Corporate Communications,
Glyndŵr University

Rob Humphreys Director, The Open University in Wales

Michelle Matheron Policy and Public Affairs Manager, The
Open University in Wales

Wednesday 27 November 2013

Professor John Hughes Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University

Amanda Wilkinson Director of Higher Education Wales

Ben Arnold	Policy Adviser, Higher Education Wales
Dr David Blaney	Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Bethan Owen	Director of Institutional Engagement, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Celia Hunt	Director of Skills, Education and Funding, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Stephanie Lloyd	National Union of Students Wales President
Keiron Rees	Policy and Public Affairs Officer, National Union of Students Wales

Wednesday, 11 December 2013

Huw Lewis AM	Minister for Education and Skills
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List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=5931

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Aberystwyth University	Fin(4)-HEF01
Cardiff Metropolitan University	Fin(4)-HEF02
University of South Wales	Fin(4)-HEF03
Higher Education Wales	Fin(4)-HEF04
National Union of Students Wales	Fin(4)-HEF05
Cardiff University	Fin(4)-HEF06
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	Fin(4)-HEF07
Open University in Wales	Fin(4)-HEF08

Additional Written Evidence

[Summary of Higher Education Funding Inquiry Survey](#)

[Transcript of Web-chat](#)

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Open University Wales	FIN(4)-22-13(ptn1)
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	FIN(4)-01-14(ptn1)
Higher Education Wales	FIN(4)-01-14(ptn2)
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	FIN(4)-01-14(ptn3)
Professor Julie Williams	FIN(4)-02-14(ptn1)