

Universities Wales response to CYPE HE Approach and Position 18 August 2020

In challenging circumstances, students have shown themselves to be resilient, dedicated and adaptable, and universities in Wales are committed to doing all they can to support students' progress to higher education.

Admissions are a matter of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, so approaches will inevitably vary by institution. However, learners can be assured that every effort will be made by universities to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by this year's processes.

While this is a unique year, universities and their staff are well used to supporting students who have not quite achieved the grades they needed and admissions teams are on hand to help those students.

This year more than ever, universities in Wales will be fair and flexible to consider an applicant's context. This includes how universities can provide support for disadvantaged students entering university, and in taking contextual factors into account which can be vital in reflecting an individual student's circumstances and potential.

It's also important to remember that places are not decided on grades alone, with information in personal statements and references part of the decision-making process, along with any interview, portfolio, audition or other relevant information.

Welsh universities will maintain as much flexibility as possible to keep places open for those considering appeals or defaulting to a centre assessed grade - recognising the difficult situation for English applicants which does not appear to be fully replicated and of the same scale for Welsh applicants. During this time, universities will keep their applicants up-to-date on the implications of the appeals process for 2020 entry.

It is worth noting that at this stage of the cycle, UCAS figures indicate that 9110 Welsh domiciled applicants have been placed in Welsh institutions, an increase on the 2019 figures despite the demographic dip in 18 year olds. 2020 also sees a record proportion of Welsh students entering higher education across the UK. This coupled with a 7% increase in English domiciled students being placed in Welsh institutions demonstrates the flexibility that our members have already shown.

We hope any appeals are completed as quickly as possible, both to help bring clarity for students and because universities will start welcoming students very soon. However, we do note that the longer the delay the harder it will be for Welsh institutions to maintain ultimate flexibility due to the impact on the learner, with issues such as social distancing remaining key to planning and student experience. It's also important to note that universities' wish to support applicants by providing flexibility on dates and holding offers does have limitations for courses that have placements such as medicine and nursing which must abide closely to professional body regulations.

Our advice to students who don't get the required grades would be to contact their first choice university, who will be happy to discuss their options, with some potentially willing to reduce grade requirements. We would also advise students to consider all of the options available through Clearing, which has been enhanced to provide more tailored options than ever before.

It is vital that the admissions process remains fair, consistent, and in the best interests of all students, and it is important that all parties – universities, Qualifications Wales, HEFCW and Welsh Government - work together on this.