

Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education
Cathays Park

4 November 2016

Dear Cabinet Secretary

Diamond Review

Following the publication of the Independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements (Diamond Review) the Economy Infrastructure and Skills (EIS) Committee were keen to explore how this work will impact on areas in our remit.

At a meeting of the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) committee on 12 October, Hefin David and I took an opportunity to question Professor Sir Ian Diamond on his report as it relates to the EIS committee’s remit.

The following day EIS Committee held a stakeholder session to gather reactions. We were grateful that senior officials from Welsh Government attended this event in order to hear responses directly and feed back to you.

The event heard discussions on the likely impact on the Welsh economy, post-graduate research and the development of higher level skills. To close we also asked for general comments. This letter sets out our conclusions and recommendations arising from that meeting.

Conclusions

The Diamond recommendations have been well received by a wide cross-section of stakeholders. There is particular enthusiasm for the notion that all students – not just those undergraduates aged 18 plus in full-time education – will be



eligible for support based on need. The idea that Wales could lead the way in this approach has been very popular.

It is especially popular with regard to upskilling the existing workforce, many of whom would find support for part-time study alongside their work particularly attractive.

While the Diamond recommendations are seen as a solution to the specific remit given to the review group, there is widespread acknowledgement that there remain other issues in higher education – like recruitment and retention of staff – which will still require further thinking and action.

We are aware that, following their meeting with Professor Diamond, the Children, Young People and Education Committee has recommended that the Diamond recommendations are implemented in full and fully funded for the duration of this Assembly.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- The implementation of the Diamond recommendations should be integrated with the work going on to ensure that our education system enables individuals to develop the skills which will be needed in the Welsh economy, and the work on a new Economic Strategy;
- Further work will be required to address reforms in higher education which are outside the scope of the Diamond Review;
 - this may include measures to offset the impact of Brexit on overseas recruitment of both students and teaching staff;
 - but also consideration of measures to address the significant impact on lecturers' workloads, especially considering the already high number of international students, particularly postgraduates.



- The Minister for Skills and Science reviews the Welsh Government’s level of support for innovation projects and that the Cabinet Secretary for Education considers how effectively entrepreneurial skills are nurtured in higher education. Committee Members heard that small amounts of financial support for innovation projects can reap significant rewards;
- The Welsh Government actively promotes a more “dynamic” relationship between further education and higher education, including reviewing and evaluating different models of FE/HE collaboration and partnership, which complement rather than replicate. The potential benefits of this are to:
 - encourage the progression of individual students;
 - increase the number of learners attaining higher level skills;
 - encourage more flexible pathways between education/learning (full and part-time); economic inactivity; and employment (full and part-time); and
 - help to regenerate communities with high levels of economic inactivity and deprivation.
- The Welsh Government reviews the ways in which SMEs engage with the higher education sector and ways in which this can be made more effective. SMEs often lack the time, resources and understanding of how to engage with the higher education sector effectively.
- The Welsh Government evaluates the impact of the Diamond Review recommendations. We think this should take place three years after implementation of the changes.

I understand that the Welsh Government will be issuing its response to the Diamond recommendations in the coming weeks, and I trust that the Committee’s consideration of the issues and recommendations will be helpful to you.



Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russell George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'R' and a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Russell George AM

Chair

Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Cc: Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language (including Further Education)

Cc: Julie James AM, Minister for Skills and Science

Cc: Lynne Neagle AM, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

