

Children, Young People and Education Committee

From: Welsh Government

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Venue: Senedd Cardiff Bay

Title: Evidence paper on Further Education and Higher Education

Introduction

This paper provides written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on further education (FE) and higher education (HE). It focuses on the key strategic priorities for each sector, drawn from the areas of interest identified in the Chair's letter of 20 August 2018.

1. General update

The higher and further education sectors make a significant contribution to the economy, social justice, public services and culture in Wales and to Welsh Government objectives via the provision of high quality education, training, research, innovation and engagement. The two sectors have a turnover of £1.5bn for HE¹ and £0.5bn for FE and employ around 29,000 FTE staff (21,000 HE² and 8,000 FE). In terms of outcomes, over 40,000 students graduate from HE each year and, in FE, 194,000 learning activities were completed by 111,000 learners (academic year 2016/17).

Higher education is a globally competitive sector. To avoid undermining our institutions' ability to compete on the world stage, it is vital that universities in Wales continue to be able to recruit international talent from the EU and elsewhere, participate in international research collaborations and networks, offer qualifications that are internationally recognised and attract students from the EU and around the globe.

Whilst Further Education tends to operate in a more local market, it is important that learners are able to access a broad range of academic and vocational training options and we need to ensure these qualifications are transportable. Further Education, whether delivered in schools or colleges is key to the future success of the nation. It enables progression on to higher level learning (often in partnership with universities); it supports the foundational economy; it enables adults to improve their literacy and numeracy skills; it assists community inclusion through the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages; it helps employers to up-skill their workforce and enables the delivery of important social and public services.

¹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Higher-Education/Staff-and-Finance/financeofheis-by-category-year>

² <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Higher-Education/Staff-and-Finance/staffatwelshheis-by-gender-institution-year-modeofemployment>

Provision tends to be aligned with the economic area within which each college operates and in-work learning is supported through our flagship apprenticeship programme, which is partly funded by the European Social Fund.

HE Student Support

The Welsh Government, through Student Finance Wales (SFW), provides loans and grants to eligible Welsh students wherever they choose to study in the UK. Following the comprehensive independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales (the Diamond Review), the Cabinet Secretary for Education has introduced a new package of support for students starting their course from academic year (AY) 2018/19 onwards.

At the heart of the new system is a shift in focus in undergraduate support towards support for living costs. A key message from students and the National Union of Students is that it is day-to-day living costs which are causing students most concern. It is a key reason why students are not able to contemplate starting higher education or, worse, causing them to drop out without successfully completing their course.

The Welsh Government has, therefore, introduced a fair and sustainable support system where all Welsh students will receive support equivalent to the UK national living wage. The support will be means-tested and will be a mixture of loans and grants. This means that a full-time Welsh student living away from home (outside London) will be eligible for maintenance support of £9,000 - students from a lowest household income (up to £18,370) would get a full grant of around £8,100 and a loan of £900 towards their living costs (if living away from home, outside London).

Our 'whole system approach' means that Wales will be the only country in Europe to provide equivalent maintenance support, in grants and loans, to part-time and full-time undergraduates and, from 2019, this will be extended to postgraduate students. In turn this shift in focus will allow Welsh Government to provide additional investment in our higher education institutions to ensure that they are able to compete both domestically and internationally.

Living Wage

As of the end of July 2017, Welsh universities become signatories to the Welsh Government's Code of Practice Ethical Employment in Supply Chains. This is a significant landmark as our institutions became the first to sign up as a sector, and includes an additional commitment to work towards becoming Living Wage Employers. This work is being coordinated by the Higher Education Purchasing Consortium for Wales (HEPCW). The universities are developing their documentation and action plans in response to the Code's commitments. A working group has been set up by procurement staff across the universities in Wales to support the implementation of the Code of Practice. In a meeting with officials, HEPCW advised that all HEIs have responded and their feedback is currently being fed into a collective report.

The sector has made a commitment to pay the Living Wage Foundation's living wage to all directly employed HE staff by 2018/19 and to start the process of implementing the living wage across their outsourced HE activity, from 2018/19 and HEFCW are currently working with the institutions to ensure they gain formal accreditation.

Achievements

Civic Mission

The sector continues to work hard at developing their civic mission and are developing a wider portfolio of activities in their local communities. This includes a Physics Mentoring programme led by Cardiff University and 35 distinct projects with activities ranging from choirs for the homeless, and school governor initiatives, to providing space and mentoring for student and graduate start-ups. Aligned to this, HEFCW's Innovation Nation - On Common Ground event and publication broadcast more widely successful civic mission activities and interventions undertaken by Welsh institutions.

Work between our HE and FE institutions, as well as local schools, gathers pace in advance of PCET reforms and there are some good examples of enhanced collaboration between HE and FE in innovation and engagement activities.

Coding

£1.2m of funding has been allocated, via HEFCW, to support Swansea and Cardiff Universities' membership of the Institute of Coding. Both universities will benefit from the funding, which will include £200,000 to support coding initiatives in schools, colleges and universities. This investment is on top of a £1.3m drive to connect Welsh pupils with coding, Cracking the Code, which was announced last year.

Global Wales

Global Wales is a partnership between Universities Wales, the Welsh Government (EEAD, EPS, Trade & Invest and Visit Wales), British Council Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

A three-year funding allocation of £3.5m has been made to Global Wales II (2018-21) as part of the first tranche of allocations under the £50m EU Transition Fund, which aims to help business public services and others prepare for the impact of Brexit. The project will be funded via HEFCW. It will aim to sustain and grow Wales' HE existing export contribution, diversify the international student body, making Wales less susceptible to fluctuations in individual markets including the EU and to boost Wales' global profile in key overseas markets.

2. The Cabinet Secretary's and First Minister's agreed priorities

The promotion and enhancement of academic and vocational routes into – and through – further and higher education.

Wales has all the ingredients needed to compete with other skilled nations, but we must create a technical education system that can harness that talent and offer pathways to higher level skills. This cannot be done by government alone, we must work with employers and post-16 providers to unlock the potential in this country.

We have already made an investment in apprenticeships and the policy document (published in 2017) strengthens our approach to earning and learning. We now have a suite of activity operation starting with Junior Apprenticeships (for those aged 14-16); Preparation to Apprenticeships (16-18 within Further Education); Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships (being delivered by Higher Education Providers in Wales).

The Further Education learning programmes are expected to provide a clear identified learning pathway to employment or to further/higher learning in order to aid learners to make the right choices. Programmes are closely monitored and best practice shared with stakeholders to ensure content is what employers want and what learners need to progress to their next chosen stage. Also, the £10m Skills Development Fund has been introduced for academic year 2018/19 to allow the Further Education sector to respond to and develop provision to address job specific skills gaps, at a regional level, as identified by Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs). A key parameter of this funding is that colleges can only deliver provision that has been supported by the Regional Skills Partnerships as having employer relevance for opportunities in the region.

In terms of measuring our approach there are two strategic mechanisms we intend to monitor ourselves against:

Firstly, how effective we are in terms of bringing training in line with the needs of the economy in order to drive up productivity and prosperity. The three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) are tasked with analysing economic challenges and likely growth areas to identify the skills needed in the workforce. We will use the analysis within their Annual Plans and associated data to influence the provision of skills in each region.

The second is our commitment within the Welsh Government's Employability Plan published in March 2018. We have stated that we will eliminate the gap between Wales and the rest of the UK at all qualification levels within ten years, and ensure that in future, as a minimum, we maintain our performance relative to the rest of the UK.

As part of a new set of consistent performance measures for post-16 learning, officials are developing a measure for learner destinations. This will identify the proportion of learners who progress into further learning and/or employment after leaving their programme of study each year. The measure uses matched education

and employment records, the latter obtained through participation in the UK Government's Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEOS) programme.

The first statistics on the destinations for learners who completed their learning in the 2015/16 academic year are due to be published in September 2018. The measure will be subject to consultation with learning providers and Estyn before the methodology is finalised. In future, the matched data offers significant opportunities to analyse the destinations of, for example, learners studying different subjects and programmes; those from different socio-economic groups; those with protected characteristics; and those with different levels of attainment at Key Stage 4.

Degree apprenticeships

Degree Apprenticeships continue to be developed in Wales – a partnership approach between employers and the education sector led by HEFCW. We provided funding in 2016-17 to enable institutions to develop degree level qualifications which could be incorporated into apprenticeship frameworks. In 2018-19 HEFCW has been allocated £3m to implement the first phase of delivery in the digital technology and engineering sectors. HEFCW has sought proposals from providers and are currently assessing and responding to these bids.

Build ambition and encourage learning for life

We will widen peoples' horizons and lift their aspirations by creating a dynamic, entrepreneurial culture and ensuring they have opportunities to grow and achieve more throughout their lives.

Ensuring that everyone in Wales has access to the opportunities and support they need to fulfil their ambitions is vital. We are undertaking a series of reforms to ensure a system that delivers on the needs of Wales in the 21st century, both for people and businesses.

We have reformed our support for students following the Diamond Review to bring in the most generous system anywhere in the UK. By investing in enhanced support for postgraduate and part-time study alongside full-time undergraduates, we are ensuring that the mission to widen access is fit for the pace of change in the new technological and economic age.

3. Initial teacher training and education (ITET) accreditation,

An assessment of the impact of the ITET accreditation decisions on Swansea University and the University of South Wales;

Swansea University is not currently an ITE provider in Wales. The accreditation decision does not therefore impact on the current ITE provision across Wales.

Welsh Government is awaiting the outcome of University of South Wales' appeal of the accreditation decision announced in June. We expect EWC to meet its statutory obligations with regards to the appeal process.

Currently the vast majority of USW provision is at an undergraduate level for those wishing to specialise in primary education. There are also a very small number of trainees at USW undertaking maths and general science undergraduate and design & technology postgraduate courses.

An assessment of ITET applications against targets for September 2018

The latest UCAS statistics³ (monthly applicants for the 2018 cycle) suggest that there are 120 fewer postgraduate applicants via this system than at the same point last year. In August 2017 there were 1,950 applicants (all states⁴) and this August 1,830 in Wales. This is around 6% fewer. The 2018 cycle has two more months to run and it should be noted that postgraduate applicants do not have to apply via UCAS - many choose to apply directly to providers.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record data for the 2017/18 academic year will be published by the Welsh Government in May 2019.

4. The prioritisation of support for enhanced links between education and industry

In line with the action in The National Strategy '*Prosperity for All*' for a regionally-focussed model of economic development, the Economic Action Plan set out a clear vision for a regionally focused economic development model based on the three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs):

- North Wales Economic Ambition Board – Regional Skills Partnership North Wales (NWEAB - RSP);
- South West and Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP);
- Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership (CCRSP).

RSPs have a key role in producing regional intelligence informed by employers and, as a result, have developed robust employer engagement strategies to capture the skills needs of the region and, in particular, the skills needs associated with regional infrastructure projects and priority sectors. Annual Reports were submitted to Welsh Government on 20 August 2018 and identify key economic sectors which are driving planning decisions for providers and providing a critical evidence base from which to make skills investment decisions.

³ <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-teacher-training-statistical-releases>

⁴ Placed: applicants who have either firmly accepted an unconditional offer or had their place confirmed after meeting conditions of a conditional firm offer. Conditional placed: applicants who have accepted a conditional offer as their firm choice. Unconditional offer: applicants who are holding an unconditional offer which has not been replied to. Conditional offer: applicants who are holding a conditional offer which has not been replied to. Pending provider decision: applicants who are waiting for a reply from a provider or have been invited to interview. No current offer: applicants who have either been unsuccessful in their choices, declined their offers or withdrawn. This includes applicants who have received an offer but the offer was later retracted, for example if the applicant does not meet all required conditions.

There are good examples of the work of RSPs to facilitate and encourage links between employers and the education sector which also informs the content of their Annual Reports. The North Wales RSP has aligned its activity with the regional schools consortia for North Wales – GwE – to support their response to “Successful Futures” by providing employer-led input to the regional Pioneer Schools programme. The RSP has also been involved in the development of modules aligned with the Successful Futures Programme, sharing intelligence with cross-border delivery partners as necessary. In South East Wales, the RSP has been engaged with establishing the Cardiff Commitment which is supporting young people with the support, choices and opportunities to become successful and economically productive. The public, private and third sectors work in partnership across the city to connect children and young people to the world of work. Finally, the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP) has commenced a pilot project in South West Wales, engaging with head teachers from primary and secondary schools in Carmarthenshire and Swansea, initially to raise awareness of the Swansea Bay City Deal and the career opportunities that will become available as part of the project. It is the RLSP’s intention to use this as an opportunity to engage directly with pupils within those Local Authority areas before rolling it out more widely across the region.

The Welsh Government has also been proactive in giving support to FE Colleges to fund cutting edge equipment for college students on which to learn. This equipment is available in some colleges for businesses to upskill their current staff in the evenings.

5. Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol’s remit extension into further education and work-based learning

In response to the specific Programme for Government commitment; the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol is now operating as a post-16 organisation.

A short-term task and finish group was established to review the activities of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and Welsh-medium provision in higher education and to consider whether the remit of the Coleg should be expanded to include further education and work based learning. The group published its final report, including recommendations on 25 July 2017 and the recommendations were accepted in full, including extending the Coleg remit into all post-16 sectors.

In their funding letter for 2018-19, the Welsh Government responded to the recommendations of the group and the Coleg was required to immediately expand their interactions with the post-16 sectors in areas where they currently had influence, capacity and expertise. An allocation of £150k was included in the 2018-19 funding agreement for the Coleg to expand activity in areas where an immediate benefit for the development of Welsh-medium post-16 provision. The total funding for the Coleg for 2018-19 is £5.880m.

As part of the extended role, the Coleg established an Advisory Group with representation from further education colleges and the work-based learning sector to consider the opportunities and challenges in supporting the development of Welsh-medium and bilingual education, prioritising three specific areas: to support current staff of colleges and training providers to develop their Welsh language skills in order

to teach bilingually; develop Welsh-medium teaching resources; and promoting the opportunities and benefits to learners in Welsh Government priority areas. The advisory group submitted their report to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning in July 2018.

Officials continue to work in partnership with the Coleg to develop a detailed, implementation plan, with full consideration of the wider context and dependences. This plan will be submitted to Ministers in the autumn.

The independent group established to consider the potential expansion of the Coleg's remit recommended that should the role of the Coleg be extended to the post-16 sector; there was scope within their current budget and in terms of the central activities of the Coleg to make savings and to redirect its work and its focus. The Group did not therefore see the need for a significant increase in the level of central staff in order to take on the additional responsibilities.

For 2018-19 an allocation of £150k was included in the funding agreement for the Coleg to expand activity in areas where an immediate benefit for the development of Welsh-medium post-16 provision. The allocation for 2019-20 will be dependent on the priorities identified in their post-16 implementation plan.

In addition to budget provided directly to the Coleg, budgets across the Welsh Government and especially within the Welsh Language Division support post-16 development and the aims of the post-16 plan. What the new plan will achieve is to ensure that all budget and resources aimed at Welsh-medium post-16 developments is targeted and interventions are prioritised to achieve best value for money and impact.

Further education colleges are required to plan for the increase of post-16 Welsh-medium and bilingual provision to provide linguistic continuity for learners progressing with their learning from statutory education. As a minimum, colleges need to provide Health and Social Care and/or Childcare Development qualifications through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, growing the provision to full qualifications where it is not already available. The 2018/19 Delivery Plans indicate that there is a commitment to ensuring that learners in priority areas may continue with elements or all of their learning through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

Alongside the mainstream provision, learners need to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills in preparation for the workplace. Colleges in general provide additional opportunities for learners to develop their skills and raise awareness of the increasing need for bilingual skills.

Sgiliaith, the specialist training organisation, based at Grwp Llandrillo Menai receives Welsh Government grant funding to provide training to college tutors in teaching in a bilingual setting incorporating the Welsh language into the curriculum. It provides a range of training from short half-day sessions to an accredited MA module on Bilingual Teaching Methodology. During 2017/18 Sgiliaith exceeded most of its targets and is successful in engaging with tutors that have not attended any training before.

Work Welsh (Cymraeg Gwaith) is in its second year providing Welsh language lessons to beginners up to advanced improvers and is concentrating efforts on tutors the main priority areas such e.g. Health and Social Care; Leisure and Tourism; Business Administration and IT; Agriculture/Land Based Studies and Construction. Tutors also receive individual support from the dedicated Welsh language instructor at their college enabling them to use their acquired skills with learners in the classroom.

Across the broad range of disciplines, and particularly in the Sciences and Health Sciences, the Welsh-medium offer by universities has been developing with a year on year increase in the number of subjects and modules available for students to study through the medium of Welsh. In a small number of subject areas there has been a decrease in provision where demand from students has not enabled the institution to maintain the provision or where there have been changes in staff at a local level.

The annual statistical release on the use of Welsh within HE was published on 26 July 2018. The number of students studying some of their degree through the medium of Welsh had fallen in 2016/17 from 7,780 to 6,870. However nearly 6,000 students continue to study at least 5 credits through the medium of Welsh during 2016/17; this remains the second highest number of students studying in Welsh within a year since the establishment of the Coleg.

We will be seeking further clarity regarding the underlying reasons for the decline in numbers of students using Welsh within their studies from 2015/16 to 2016/17. The Coleg has been instructed to provide a detailed report on the underlying reasons for the decline. (The initial indication is that a significant proportion of the change is due to how the provision is reported).

6. Wider Welsh Government policies and in-year funding

Funding provided to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

I made additional allocations to HEFCW totalling almost £20m in the 2017-18 financial year including:

- i) £6.2m to enable HEFCW to deal with any short-term implications arising from demographic changes and the initial implications of Brexit;
- ii) £1.8m to encourage universities to further develop activities related to their civic mission;
- iii) £1.2m to support the involvement of Welsh universities in the establishment of an Institute for Coding, which includes £0.2m to enable civic mission activity supporting coding initiatives in schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and universities;
- iv) £1.7m to help alleviate the impact of pressures on HEFCW's budget, specifically to help sustain performing arts provision;
- v) £3m to improve and increase collaboration between HE and FE, as we progress our reforms in the post-compulsory education and training sector; and

- vi) £5.9m capital to fund projects that will either directly leverage external competitive match funding or proposals that will leverage or enhance funding from internal sources.

This means that the final financial year allocation to HEFCW in 2017-18 was as follows:

	2017-18
HEFCW Revenue Expenditure	114,242,000
HEFCW Depreciation	90,000
HEFCW Capital Expenditure	5,900,000
Total	120,232,000

Building on the foundations of the final allocation of funding to HEFCW in 17-18, I have confirmed that funding will increase in 2018-19 to the following levels:

	2018-19
HEFCW Revenue Expenditure	122,216,000
HEFCW Depreciation	90,000
HEFCW Capital Expenditure	10,000,000
Total	132,306,000

Provision has been made within the Welsh Government budget for £10m capital resource to be allocated in 2018-19 to support proposals from institutions that promote more effective use of their estates. Capital resources have been allocated to the Funding Council for the next three years. Building on the work begun in response to the revised 2016-17 remit letter, the Council has been asked to develop a scheme that will help reduce institutional financial risks associated with estate utilisation. This will allow the Council to help institutions reduce the level of future expenditure on university operations as a tool for preparing institutions for significant regulatory and financial reform during the next 5 years.

In-year allocations to further education providers

In response to reduced funding from Westminster, Welsh Government recurrent funding for the sector decreased by £34.868 million between 2013/14 and 2015/16, a reduction of 11.25 per cent in cash terms over this period. However, for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19, funding for the FE sector has remained relatively stable. Funding increased by 2.54 per cent in 2017/18 which includes a one per cent increase in the unit rate and allows for a small amount of recognised growth. Further detail on the latest analysis of income to the FE sector in Wales is provided in annex i.

In addition to the mainstream allocations, the FE sector has received an additional £10m for the Skills Development Fund (SDF). The SDF has been introduced for academic year 2018/19 to allow the FE sector to respond to and develop provision to address job specific skills gaps, at a regional level, as identified by Regional Skills Partnerships. The SDF is a mechanism to reintroduce part-time provision in a managed fashion, working closely with the RSPs to ensure that these meet employer needs in each region. Its objective is also to increase the employment opportunities

of those unemployed and to increase the benefit to the Welsh economy of up-skilling those in low paid employment.

Capital funding for the FE Sector

Investment in the FE sector continues to feature significantly in Band A of the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme, which runs between 2014 and 2019. Officials have worked with FE institutions to fund major and smaller-scale schemes in line with institutional priorities. Larger schemes which have attracted funding include the new Cardiff and the Vale College Campus at Dumballs Road, Cardiff, and a new replacement campus for the Aberdare site of Coleg y Cymoedd. There has also been investment in more modest building schemes.

In 2018-19 £5 million has been distributed among the FE institutions to address backlog maintenance issues, with a further £5 million grant to fund the purchase of industry standard equipment.

We have been planning Band B of the Programme, which runs between 2019 and 2024, alongside our delivery partners in the FE sector for some time. FE institutions submitted their Strategic Outline Plans for Band B investment in July 2017 and these were largely approved in principle, subject to satisfactory business cases, in December 2017. We continue to support the sector in developing their investment plans.

EU transition funding

HERIO – Higher Education Research and Innovation Opportunities

We have received a proposal from HEFCW for the second tranche of funding under the European Transition Fund. The proposal (HERIO – Higher Education Research and Innovation Opportunities), which seeks £4.5m over three years, is intended to address the loss of EU funding for research and innovation. It will build the capacity needed to help Wales' research and innovation base compete and win additional external funding at this crucial point in time. It has been prepared by HEFCW in collaboration with the Welsh Government's Innovation Team and will be delivered by the two organisations working in partnership, as reforms are progressed in the PCET sector. Bids will be considered by Ministers in September.

Global Wales II allocation

Global Wales is a partnership between Universities Wales, the Welsh Government (EEAD, EPS, Trade & Invest and Visit Wales), British Council Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). It aims to support investment in Wales by building collaborative ventures through market research, intelligence gathering, targeted inward visits and outward missions and increased promotional activities such as the delivery of the 'Study in Wales' brand in key markets.

Global Wales II (2018-21) has been approved for £3.5m funding over three years as part of the first tranche of allocations under the EU Transition Fund. The project will be funded via HEFCW, which will also take responsibility for reporting on progress to

the Welsh Government. It will aim to sustain and grow Wales' HE existing export contribution, diversify the international student body, making Wales less susceptible to fluctuations in individual markets including the EU and to boost Wales' global profile in key overseas markets.

7. PCET reform progress as consulted on this spring and summer, and an explanation of the next steps

The White Paper "*Public Good and a Prosperous Wales*" set out the broad options and proposals for the Commission's proposed functions and the way in which it might work with different types of learning providers. Following the White Paper consultation last year, a further technical consultation document "*Public Good and a Prosperous Wales – the next steps*" was published on 24 April. This consultation took account of the feedback received and developed further some of the ideas in the White Paper and explained in more technical detail how we envisage the new Commission might operate. The consultation closed on 17 July and a total of 422 responses were received. Respondents remain broadly very supportive of the reforms.

During the technical consultation period a number of themed focus groups were held with selected stakeholders. They each covered a particular section of the technical consultation and stakeholders with a particular interest in these areas were invited to attend. In addition, officials have also spoken at a range of representative bodies' committee meetings. The feedback from the focus groups and written responses to the technical consultation are being analysed and taken into account during the next stage in the legislative process, the development of the policy instructions for lawyers. A summary of responses is expected to be published later in the Autumn, with a view to bringing forward legislative proposals in this Assembly term.

8. Equality of opportunity for, and the promotion of higher education to, under-represented groups

Fee and Access Plans

The Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 requires that all higher education providers that wish for their courses to be automatically designated for statutory student support commit to activities and investments in support of objectives related to the promotion of equality of opportunity in connection with access to higher education and promotion of higher education. In this context promotion of equality of opportunity in connection with access to higher education relates to removing barriers to higher education that members of under-represented groups experience.

Higher education providers are required to set out these activities and investments in fee and access plans which are submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) for approval. The 2015 Act builds on provisions in the Higher Education Act 2004 which designated HEFCW as the relevant authority for fair access in Wales.

A fee and access plan must set out fee levels, total anticipated fee income and the intended total fee amount to be invested by and HE institution in equality of

opportunity and the promotion of higher education, in line with Welsh Government fee and access plan guidance.

Widening Access

The Welsh Government has already funded a number of programmes to encourage greater participation from under represented groups in PCET such as the Reaching Wider Programme and measures introduced in the Higher Education Act 2015. There is, however, a need for more analysis and research to understand the outcomes for learners from different backgrounds and to ensure that PCET providers have all the information they need to advise and support these learners to reach their full potential. As the new Commission will have oversight of the whole PCET sector there is the opportunity to improve the current data sharing arrangements with a focus on learner choices and decision making to provide insights for policy development to support widening access.

HEFCW's regional widening access programme 'Reaching Wider' offers educational aspiration-raising and skills opportunities to encourage students to consider applying to higher education. The three Reaching Wider regional Partnerships provide activities that encourage progression to a range of HE, including medical-related provision.

In 2018-19, the Cabinet Secretary for Education remitted HEFCW to work with officials to develop a programme of action for higher education, which takes into account the additional funding allocations provided to the Council in 2017-18 and builds upon the various strands of activity taken forward in response to WISERD's 2015 report to the Council on access to higher education in Wales. The Cabinet Secretary has asked for the action plan to be in place by January 2019.

9. Action the Welsh Government is taking to ensure that higher and further education institutions support and promote students' wellbeing

In 2018-19, the Cabinet Secretary for Education has remitted HEFCW to work with partners on strengthening the approach to enhancing safeguarding practices and resilience, supporting employee and student initiatives that tackle violence against women, harassment and address other adverse factors affecting mental health in particular. HEFCW will be developing guidance, including sharing effective practice to institutions on identity violence taking account of the Welsh Government.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education has regular meetings with Universities in Wales and is aware that our institutions are committed to working to improve the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. All Welsh universities report a range of mental health and wellbeing interventions and initiatives to support students and staff in their equality annual reports.

In discussions with colleges during the summer term 2018, learners' mental health was raised consistently as one of the main challenges facing the further education sector. A summary prepared by colleges' Student Services Network highlighted issues including anxiety, depression, increased incidences of self-harm, and issues around bullying (including on social media). Following these discussions, officials

have invited CollegesWales to submit a proposal for a support project to help build capacity in the further education sector to support learners experiencing mental health issues. Discussions on this are ongoing, but we anticipate that the work is likely to include the development of a guidance 'toolkit' and training resources for college staff.

Public Health Wales has developed a '[Health Colleges and Universities Framework](#)' as an extension of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) into Higher Education and Further Education settings. The framework is split into six health topics and four aspects of college and university life. The health topics cover mental and emotional health and wellbeing, physical activity, healthy and sustainable food, substance use and misuse, personal and sexual health and relationships, sustainable environment.

10. The Welsh Government's position in relation to the reconfiguration of higher education

There is no formal policy for reconfiguration. However, the Welsh Government continues to support and encourage greater collaboration in the HE sector, whether that be through strategic alliances or formal collaborations across departments, to ensure the sustainable delivery of high quality, accessible HE provision. The PCET reforms will also ensure further collaboration across HE, FE and Sixth Forms.

11. Delivery - the plans and systems in place to ensure that Welsh Government teams supporting pre and post-16 education work together on, and coordinate the delivery of, Welsh Government policy

There is a commitment to develop and deliver policy across ministerial portfolios within the Welsh Government and arrangements are in place to ensure that this approach is followed for pre and post 16 Education. There are regular discussions between Ministers and officials to ensure consistency in approach and in the development of policies and joint senior management team meetings between directorates to ensure senior colleagues across the whole of education are kept informed about, and involved in, policy developments. This cross departmental working can be evidenced with improved policy making. As an example, HE Division uses the data it holds on university students to provide analysis and evidence to the ITE Team. Close working and regular discussion around evidence needs has resulted in the refinement of routine statistical publications and the provision of additional analysis to inform the evaluation and development of ITE policy.

This will be further developed as we implement our reforms to the PCET system which will specifically aim to improve transition between different parts of the education system. To date there has been, and will continue to be, liaison between education colleagues and the Bill team since the decision was taken by Cabinet to bring sixth form provision within the ambit of the new Commission. This has included ongoing engagement with the Union Partnership group.

Officials from the PCET Bill team have been in discussion with their EPS colleagues to ensure any impact of current proposals on the 14-19 local curricula is assessed. The education legislation management branch which has an overview of all EPS

legislation also liaises with the PCET Bill team to ensure developments are shared and taken into account where necessary.