

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Craffu ar ôl deddfu ar Ddeddf Addysg Uwch (Cymru) 2015 | Post-legislative scrutiny of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015

HEA 07

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol De Cymru

Response from: University of South Wales

## **Summary & USW Process**

This document has been drafted in response to the National Assembly's [Children, Young People and Education Committee's](#) short and focused post-legislative scrutiny of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015. The response notes the comments of the committee in relation to the well-advanced status of the work on the proposed Post-compulsory Education, Training and Research (PCETR) reforms.

Comments on the questions posed were sourced from the University's Vice Chancellor's Executive Board and the Head of Planning & Performance who has responsibility for development and monitoring of Fee and Access Plans.

## **Overview**

The University of South Wales welcomes the opportunity to contribute and in overall terms our response:

- echoes the views of Universities Wales as a representative body of the interests of Universities in Wales
- agrees with the view of Universities Wales' that the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 (hereafter known as the Act) has continued to provide a 'robust regulatory system' in Wales.
- raises concerns around the burdensome nature of some of the impacts of the Act and the impact that these have on strategic activities of the institution – these focus on Fee and Access Plans.

<b>Question</b>	<b>University of South Wales Response</b>
<p>1. Has, or is the Act, achieving its policy objectives, and if not why not? These were:</p> <p><i>The Welsh Government's primary policy objectives in relation to the Bill are to:</i></p> <p><i>(a) ensure robust and proportionate regulation of institutions in Wales whose courses are supported by Welsh Government backed higher education grants and loans;</i></p> <p><i>(b) safeguard the contribution made to the public good arising from the Welsh Government's financial subsidy of higher education;</i></p> <p><i>(c) maintain a strong focus on fair access to higher education; and</i></p> <p><i>(d) preserve and protect the institutional autonomy and academic freedom of universities.</i></p>	<p>The University of South Wales echoes the comments made by Universities Wales in response to this question. Specific comments in relation to the University of South Wales' operations are as follows:</p> <p>a) The system is clearly robust. Proportionality is a challenge as there is some mismatch between the level of risk and the increased burden that the Act has provided for HEIs particularly around the Fee and Access Planning process.</p> <p>b) It is too early to comment on this as the impact of the Diamond Review is yet to be realised. This has added uncertainty in University financial positions.</p> <p>c) The development of Fee and Access Plans (albeit bureaucratic and cumbersome) focus entirely on full-time undergraduate provision and this is not the sole vehicle for promoting fair access to higher education in Wales</p> <p>d) The challenge of a devolved Act will always present challenges in the UK. There is some risk to institutional autonomy (challenges to sustainability) through models that support differing fee regimes in a competitive marketplace. Delivery of HE across the border into England also provides additional challenge and bureaucracy which can sometimes lead to decisions not to proceed with activity. This may not be in the best interest of the local learner. For the same reasons emerging challenges in relation to HE Data (HESA) and Quality Assurance (QAA) would suggest a move away from a UK approach challenging the ability of HEIs to benchmark activities in a transparent way.</p>

<p>2. How well are the Act's overall arrangements working in practice, including any actions your organisation has had to take under the Act?</p>	<p>The University will consider how effective arrangements are working in practice separately Quality Assurance and for Fee and Access Planning.</p> <p>For Quality Assurance the arrangements appear to be working effectively and the Quality Assessment Framework and related HEFCW guidance documents have been helpful. Actions we have taken locally, include implementation of the requirement for the Board of Governors' annual statements on Quality. This has built on existing practice and developed closer links between our governance strands (Board, Academic Board and Executive).</p> <p>For Fee and Access Planning, this has added significant workload to the University and through the bedding down of the processes has also caused challenges around change. The balance of effort for regulated institutions with consistent, and significant, performance in relation to provision of higher education to under-represented groups would appear to be wasteful. For the University of South Wales, the highest educator of WIMD and Polar3 students in Wales to be required to justify spend on what is essentially our core mission continues to be a challenge and a diversion of resource from areas of strategy development, planning and delivery of change. One area of significant challenge for the University is the inclusion of our Board in the process. Timescales do not allow for this vital aspect of the work and the balance of time in the development of Fee and Access Plans is given to HEFCW rather than the HEIs who develop and deliver the plans. It is also clear that the process and its outputs is not useful or accessible to students.</p>
<p>3. Are the costs of the Act, or your organisations own costs for actions</p>	<p>It is difficult to quantify costs, but our comments on the previous section suggest that there has been an increased cost in</p>

<p>taken under the Act, in-line with what Welsh Government stated they'd be?</p>	<p>terms of planning resource, senior staff time in preparing and agreeing Fee and Access Plans and responding to requests for information. The additional cost of the interim period pre Diamond has also meant ad-hoc bid development for other funding streams in the time period concerned.</p>
<p>4. Has the Act achieved value for money?</p>	<p>We have no additional comments to make in this area over and above those made by Universities Wales.</p>
<p>5. Have there been any unintended or negative consequences arising from the Act?</p>	<p>We have no further comments to make in addition to those made in response to earlier questions.</p>
<p>6. Are there any lessons to be learned from the Act and how it is working in practice that may be relevant to the proposed Post-compulsory Education, Training and Research (PCETR) Bill?</p>	<p>Again we endorse the view of Universities Wales. Any new Bill should more holistically consider the student body (not just full time students) and should be considered in partnership with HEIs and other key stakeholders.</p>
<p>7. Are there any lessons to be learned from how this Act was prepared in 2014/15 (formulated, consulted on, drafted etc)?</p>	<p>We endorse the comments made by Universities Wales and have no further comments to make in this area.</p>