

Press release

Date: Thursday 4 June 2009

Title: Diverse student body in Welsh universities

New UK-wide figures show that universities and colleges in Wales have continued to perform well in recruiting students from under-represented groups.

The Welsh higher education (HE) sector has recorded similar or higher proportions of students from most under-represented groups in higher education compared to the UK as a whole.

The figures for the academic year 2007/08 show the Welsh HE sector's achievements in widening participation in HE.

The annual performance indicators also showed Welsh HE's achievements in specific areas, with particular successes in the recruitment of full-time undergraduate students who received a disabled students' allowance, and of young, full-time undergraduates from state schools.

Of particular note for Wales in 2007/08 were:

- 93.6% of young full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh HEIs in 2007/08 were from state schools or colleges, a similar proportion to last year and greater than the UK as a whole at 88.5%. Eight out of 11 HEIs had proportions that were significantly higher than the benchmark. (Table 1b)

- 26.7% of full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh HEIs in 2007/08 were mature, a similar proportion to the UK as a whole at 26.5%. 12.2% of such entrants had no previous HE experience and were from a low participation neighbourhood, compared to 11.5% for the UK as a whole. (Table 2a)
- The proportion of full-time undergraduate students in Welsh HEIs in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) continues to rise, with 5.8% in receipt of DSA in 2007/08. This also continues to be greater than the proportion for the UK as a whole, at 4.5% in 2007/08. (Table 7)
- For young full-time undergraduate entrants to Welsh HEIs in 2007/08, the proportion from NS-SEC Classes 4, 5, 6 & 7 (30.8%) continued to be greater than the proportion for the UK as a whole. (Table 1b)

The figures also highlighted the challenges of retaining non-traditional students in higher education once they were there:

- The proportion of young full-time first degree entrants to Welsh HEIs in 2006/07 from low participation neighbourhoods that were not in HE in 2007/08 was 11.6%, higher than that for the UK as a whole at 9.8%. (Table 3b)
- For mature full-time first degree entrants to Welsh HEIs in 2006/07 with no previous HE qualification, the proportion that were not in HE in 2007/08 is 18.5%, higher than for the UK as a whole at 15.1%. (Table 3c)

Professor Philip Gummett, Chief Executive of HEFCW, said: "The figures underline our universities' and colleges' commitment to offering opportunities to those who can benefit from higher education.

"Welsh institutions have demonstrated their dedication to widening access over a number of years through these performance indicators, and continue to perform

well in the UK context. We are particularly pleased with the successes in recruiting disabled students and those from state schools.

“Higher education institutions will continue to spread the word that those who have the ability to benefit from the HE experience should give it a go. This includes using the *Reaching Wider* partnership programme, where institutions work directly with schools in disadvantaged areas, minority ethnic communities, disabled people and those interested in pursuing Welsh medium courses.

“Such work, along with extra funding that we now allocate for students that have traditionally been harder to recruit and, in particular, retain, should drive further improvements. We are already developing work to address further the retention issue, which is always a challenging counterpoint to bold initiatives in widening access.”

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Notes:

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Performance Indicators

Full text and tables of Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the UK 2007/08 can be found on the HESA website at www.hesa.ac.uk/pi .

The Performance Indicators are published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on the behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Scottish Funding Councils (SFC), and in Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

In 2007/08, a new HESA student record was introduced. This should be taken into consideration when making any comparisons with previous years' performance indicators.

Scotland is not included in the UK figures for the following tables:

Table 1a, Table 1b, Table 1c (low participation neighbourhood figures only), Table 2a, Table 2b, Table 2c and Table 3b.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) is an Assembly Government Sponsored Body which administers funds made available by the Welsh Assembly Government to support:

- education in higher education institutions (HEIs);
- research undertaken by HEIs; and
- higher education courses at further education colleges.

HEFCW also accredits providers **of initial teaching** training for school teachers and commissions research to improve the standards of teachers and teacher training.

In addition to its funding responsibilities, HEFCW advises the Welsh Assembly Government on the funding needs, aspirations and concerns of the higher education sector in Wales.