

Cylchlythyr

Circular

Foundation Degrees

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales;
Principals of directly-funded further education institutions
in Wales
Copied to: Principals of all other further education institutions in
Wales; post-16 providers in Wales; local authorities;
Sector Skills Councils; employer representative groups
and other interested parties
Response by: 7 January 2011
Contact: Name: Dr Alyson Thomas
Telephone: 029 2068 2303
Email: alyson.thomas@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular presents HEFCW's policy on foundation degrees (**Part 1: HEFCW Foundation Degree Policy**) and announces the allocation of *One Wales* funding for the development, promotion and delivery of new part-time foundation degree provision, inviting proposals by **7 January 2011 (Part 2: Delivery of HEFCW Policy)**.

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Foundation Degrees

Introduction

1. The Welsh Assembly Government's skills strategy, *Skills that Work for Wales* (July 2008) signalled that the Assembly Government would develop and consult on a foundation degree policy. This commitment was reinforced in its strategy for higher education, *For our Future*, which stated the Assembly Government's intention to support the qualification as a key enabler in relation to its twin priorities of social justice and a buoyant economy. The Assembly Government has now invited HEFCW to take forward the development of foundation degrees. This document therefore presents HEFCW's policy on foundation degrees (**Part 1: HEFCW Foundation Degree Policy**); and announces the allocation of *One Wales* funding for the development, promotion and delivery of new part-time foundation degree provision, inviting proposals by **7 January 2011 (Part 2: Delivery of HEFCW Policy)**.

Part 1: HEFCW Foundation Degree Policy

Defining the Foundation Degree

2. This new qualification was originally launched in Wales in 2001 through our publication of a *Foundation Degree Prospectus* (circular W01/23HE, March 2001)¹ and by the specific allocation of funding to HEIs for a limited amount of foundation degree programme development (a total of £200,000 was allocated across seven HEIs). The Prospectus described the framework of core features that define the foundation degree to provide guidance for those institutions wishing to offer the new qualification. In the interests of furthering common understanding of the qualification, and to reassure employers that this Welsh opportunity was of the same standard and quality as developments already underway in England, the core features were consistent with those specified in the Foundation Degree Prospectus published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in July 2000².
3. HEFCW's *Foundation Degree Prospectus* identified the main objectives of the foundation degree qualification. These objectives are reiterated now as a statement of HEFCW policy, with equality of opportunity as a fundamental principle:
 - To help address a national skills shortfall by supplying graduates equipped with intermediate level skills;

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www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20050711120000/http://www.wfc.ac.uk/education/hefcw/pub01/w0123he.html

² www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2000/00_27.htm

- To expand higher education while making it more affordable to a wider range of students;
- To bring institutions of higher education and further education and employers together in partnership for the design and delivery of provision which will promote social inclusion; and
- To extend the routes to lifelong learning.

4. The core features of the foundation degree are:

- **employer involvement:** employers and representative bodies actively involved from the outset in the design, promotion and review of foundation degree programmes; employers themselves will need to be active in their delivery to ensure that the qualification reflects the changing needs of the economy;
- **development of skills and knowledge:** new foundation degree programmes should provide a combination of skills and knowledge to make a more versatile and adaptable workforce, and should include specialist technical skills, key skills and other generic skills, underpinned by rigorous and broad-based academic learning;
- **application of skills in the workplace:** students have to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills but also need to have applied this in the workplace, either through existing employment or a secured work placement, ie a close integration of study and work-based learning and project work addressing real business needs;
- **credit accumulation and transfer:** foundation degrees should attract a minimum of 240 credits, with consortia agreeing and applying credit accumulation and transfer arrangements. Accreditation of prior and work-based/experiential learning should be fully accommodated within these new programmes. Each consortium offering programmes should consider how best to maximise both entry and progression numbers and to promote lifelong learning;
- **progression:** the routes for progression should be both occupational and academic and these options should be clearly articulated through the course programme and prospectus. There should normally be at least one guaranteed progression route to a full honours degree qualification.

5. Foundation degrees are located within level 5 of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) defines the foundation degree as having a minimum of 240 credits across levels 3, 4 and 5 (with a minimum of 90 credits at level 5 and a maximum of 30 credits at level 3). Foundation degrees normally guarantee progression to at least one honours bachelors degree, with the

expectation that the time required for this should normally not exceed 1.3 years FTE. These progression routes are established when the foundation degree is validated.

6. In 2007, HEFCW commissioned a study into the role of foundation degrees in Wales to review the contribution they might make to fulfilling skills needs in the Welsh policy context. This review summarised the views of key stakeholders in Wales about foundation degrees, who saw them as important stepping stone qualifications, particularly suited to part-time learners in work. The review's recommendations included the conclusion that additional student numbers, development costs and promotional costs should be provided to support the further development of foundation degree programmes within Wales, and that programmes awarded should:
 - demonstrate that they meet the QAA Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark (paragraphs 19-23);
 - include evidence of market demand and longer-term sustainability of provision;
 - build in employer engagement throughout the development and delivery of programmes;
 - provide clear progression routes to other higher education.

Policy context

7. Foundation degrees have previously been signalled as a key element in the Welsh Assembly Government's aim to strengthen the contribution of higher education to workforce development, as set out in *Skills that Work for Wales*³ (July 2008) and, more recently, in *For our Future, The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*⁴ (November 2009).

Skills that Work for Wales

8. *Skills that Work for Wales* was the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Leitch Report *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills* (December 2006), which was itself the UK Government's reaction to the increasingly adverse differential between the UK's skills base and that of its competitors. *Skills that Work for Wales* defined foundation degrees as work-related HE qualifications designed in conjunction with employers to meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional levels. The combination of academic study with workplace learning would, it was envisaged, better

³ www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/081217stfwfwstrategyandactionen.pdf

⁴ www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091214hestrategyen.pdf

equip the workforce with the skills and knowledge needed to improve performance and productivity. *Skills that Work for Wales* asked HEFCW to take account of any advice provided by relicensed Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) on the high level skills needs in their sectors. **Annex A** sets out a role for SSCs in the context of foundation degree development, this being to advise on whether any proposed foundation degree fits with their Sector Qualification Strategies to meet the needs of business, and articulates with lower/higher level qualifications to support seamless progression routes.

9. *Skills that Work for Wales* recognised that foundation degrees needed to be equally accessible to the existing workforce as well as those presently outside the labour market. They were also seen as a means by which progression routes into higher education from work-based learning such as Modern Apprenticeships might be improved. Foundation degrees were intended, therefore, as not just a stepping stone but qualifications in their own right, valued by employers, and which prepare students for the world of work, equipping them with skills that they can apply immediately in the workplace.
10. *Skills that Work for Wales* went on to indicate the Assembly Government's intention to develop employment-related foundation degrees, particularly in sectors of strategic importance to Wales, and signalled the need to develop and consult on a policy for foundation degrees. HEFCW was subsequently invited to take this forward. In developing our policy, we recognise that HEIs may continue to offer other qualifications below honours degree level (eg Higher National Diplomas, (HNDs)), where these clearly meet employer needs and/or circumstances.

For our Future

11. Foundation degrees featured as a key element of *For our Future*, which emphasised the contribution that they could make to enabling greater diversity and flexibility in programme design and delivery in order to strengthen the contribution of higher education to workforce development. *For our Future* called for innovative new provision that meets regional needs and circumstances, developed by partnerships made up of HEIs, FEIs and employers, and drawing on the work of the Wales Employment and Skills Board, the SSCs and other relevant bodies. This provision should include progression routes from CQFW level 3 and work based learning, as well as progression routes into further study within higher education, with CQFW being used innovatively to create shorter learning programmes that facilitate and build on accredited work-based learning.
12. *For our Future* identified foundation degrees as an important element of a regional dimension to the planning and delivery of higher education, with the foundation degree awarding powers of both higher education

and further education institutions (FEIs) needing to be exercised in the context of regional, collaborative provision. This would allow providers to focus on their strengths, while working collectively to improve access and opportunity.

13. HEFCW conducted a broad consultation earlier this year as to how we should develop a regional dimension to higher education, and we have now set out the context, guidance, template, support and funding arrangements for the development of the strategies in circular W10/16HE *Guidance for the Submission of Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education* (28 May 2010)⁵. This document signalled that the Welsh Assembly Government would make available funding for additional credits for partnership-delivered foundation degrees to support institutions in developing their regional strategies (see **Part 2** of this Circular). Further information about the funding and support which will be made available to facilitate the development and implementation of regional strategies is available in circular W10/28HE *Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education: Funding and Support*⁶.
14. Foundation degrees are an important tool in the delivery of improved access to, and new opportunities in, higher education. Therefore, foundation degrees will play a key role in contributing to the social justice dimension of *For our Future*. In responding to the social justice expectations of *For our Future*, we are renewing our approach to widening access to higher education and we have now redefined widening access as follows: to ensure equity, opportunity and success in higher education to enable learners of all ages, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees. In working with the HE sector to make progress on this priority, we will need to take account of the significant contribution that widening access interventions can make to supporting people of all ages in accessing higher level learning and skills. Therefore, as part of their widening access developments, HEIs will need to ensure that they articulate clearly, and provide effective information, advice and guidance, relating to, progression routes to and from foundation degrees to enable learners to play their full part in economic regeneration.

Range of Providers

15. As encapsulated in *For our Future*, the Welsh Assembly Government's view is that foundation degrees should be delivered and awarded by the

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www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2016HE%20Regional%20strategy%20guidance.pdf

⁶ CircularW10/28HE: www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/circulars/circulars.aspx

institution which is best placed to do so. Following the publication of the HEFCW Foundation Degree Prospectus and its associated developmental funding in 2001, the majority of providers developing foundation degrees were higher education institutions. These new courses were developed with employers and were normally expected to include at least one progression route to a full honours degree.

16. As a means of supporting the wider accessibility of foundation degrees across Wales and of raising skill levels in employment, the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 extends the power for the Privy Council to specify further education institutions as competent to award foundation degrees to those institutions that are in Wales. The provision will be brought into effect in Wales on 1 October 2010, and those further education institutions wishing to apply for foundation degree awarding powers will be able to do so after this date⁷.
17. Those further education institutions who, in due course, wish to seek awarding powers must apply to the Privy Council and meet stringent Government criteria for foundation degree awarding powers, including in relation to:
 - Governance and academic management;
 - Academic standards and quality assurance;
 - Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff; and
 - The environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes.
18. In addition, any further education institution seeking foundation degree awarding powers must provide the Privy Council with a statement setting out satisfactory arrangements for the opportunity for progression for students to more advanced courses of study.

Quality Assurance

19. HEFCW has a statutory responsibility under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to ensure that assessment is made of the quality of provision in institutions for which we provide, or are considering providing, financial support. We fulfil this responsibility through our service level agreement with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Higher Education Wales (HEW). The QAA reviews institutions which receive HEFCW funding, either through the *Institutional Review: Wales* process, or through the *Review of higher education in further education colleges in Wales*, as appropriate.

⁷ Due to the timescales associated with this process, however, this is unlikely to be an issue for the period of this funding initiative.

20. The QAA, together with the higher education sector, developed a *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*⁸ as part of the academic infrastructure. All foundation degree provision across the UK is expected to meet the Benchmark.
21. Any further education institution applying for foundation degree awarding powers must demonstrate:
 - the effectiveness of its present regulatory and quality assurance arrangements;
 - its capacity to meet the expectations on academic standards; and
 - quality management as set out in the national Academic Infrastructure, which is overseen by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA).
22. While not a requirement, the QAA recommends that any institution wishing to apply for degree awarding powers should undergo a formative and a summative engagement with the QAA in advance of its application.
23. Any FEI receiving foundation degree awarding powers must subscribe to the QAA, given the shared responsibility of all degree-awarding institutions to collectively assure the standards of UK higher education awards.

Expansion of provision

24. *Skills that Work for Wales* (paragraphs 8-10) signalled the Welsh Assembly Government's intention to develop a project to extend the effective delivery of foundation degrees by establishing a range of new employment-related qualifications focused on addressing high level skills needs, particularly in sectors of strategic importance to Wales. This commitment to an expansion in numbers will be delivered through the following channels:
 - Higher Education Wales (HEW) ESF Collaborative Foundation Degree Programme
 - Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI)
 - New part-time provision (funded by *One Wales* provision), allocated by HEFCW on a regional basis and grounded in regional strategies - (first signalled in circular W10/16HE, 28 May 2010) – see **Part 2: Delivery of HEFCW Policy** (follows).

⁸ www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/foundationDegree/benchmark/FDQB.pdf

25. It is the expectation of the Assembly Government that there should be full coherence between these sources of provision. Further details are provided below.

HEW ESF Collaborative Programmes: Foundation Degree Programme

26. Under the auspices of HEW, HEIs have already established an initiative to develop foundation degrees in Wales, commencing in 2009 with £16.5 million of funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) Convergence Programme. This initiative forms part of a wider, coordinated programme which seeks to support the provision of high level skills to underpin the knowledge economy; to improve systems to identify skills needs; and to help employers identify their skills needs, anticipate potential gaps and shortages and help individuals adapt to changing economic pressures. It is enabling the development and delivery of part-time foundation degrees in an on- or off-campus environment, incorporating innovative distance learning and e-learning to meet identified skills gaps in enterprises. The first enrolments on these new programmes are expected in academic year 2010/11.
27. The programme aims to assist 1,330 employed participants who are residents in West Wales and the Valleys, focusing on the priority economic sectors as set out in *Skills that Work for Wales*:
- **Core/Enabling:** energy, environmental management; telecommunications and ICT;
 - **Strategically important:** bioscience, health (not public sector), financial services, creative industries, automotive, aerospace; and
 - **Economically important:** construction, leisure and tourism⁹
28. The HEW ESF Foundation Degree Programme business plan stipulates that delivery plans for project proposals submitted to the programme need to demonstrate collaboration in both the development and delivery of the project (a mix of input from, and partnership between, HEIs, FEIs, SSCs and employers, as appropriate), so that the provision responds to identified need.
29. HEW's wider coordinated initiative also includes a Work-Based Learning Programme, in which £34 million of ESF funding is being directed to the delivery of work-based, bite-sized learning in conjunction with employers. Both the Foundation Degree Programme and the Work-Based Learning Programme are managed by the University of Glamorgan.

⁹ *Skills that Work for Wales* also identifies the food, defence and retail sectors as economically important, but these areas were not eligible for funding under the ESF foundation degree programme. They will be eligible for funding under this the funding announced in Part 2 of this circular.

Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI)

30. In support of its major programme to address the regeneration of the Heads of the Valleys area, the Welsh Assembly Government has agreed to support a step change in the provision of foundation degrees there. More than 1,500 additional foundation degree places will be available in the Heads of the Valleys area over the next three years. This initiative aims to stimulate a greater interest in learning among disadvantaged groups, the economically inactive, and employed learners living or working in the Heads of the Valleys. The initiative is focusing on the delivery of learning in the following sectors:

- creative industries, art and culture;
- technology, engineering and science;
- sport and leisure; business development;
- community and the third sector; and
- public services, health and education.

Part 2: Delivery of HEFCW Policy

31. This section announces the allocation of *One Wales* funding for the development, promotion and delivery of new part-time foundation degree provision and invites proposals by **7 January 2011**.

One Wales funding

32. *One Wales, the progressive agenda for the government of Wales (June 2007)*¹⁰, signalled that the Welsh Assembly Government would ensure that additional funding was tied to new approaches in higher education, to the development of proposals for joint working, and for the further development of inter-university agreements for co-working between departments across Wales. £7.92 million has subsequently been allocated to support *One Wales* developments in relation to foundation degrees. Some of this funding (£280,000) has been allocated specifically to support foundation degree provision via UHOVI; the remainder (£7.64 million) is available in support of the HEFCW's Foundation Degree Policy, to fund new regionally-based foundation degrees in order to meet the needs of learners and employers at a local level. HEFCW will allocate this funding via a competitive bidding process.
33. The new regional approach to the delivery and planning of higher education development will ensure full integration of foundation degree planning and delivery. Foundation degrees will need to be seen as part of a seamless framework of HE provision in a region. It is critically important, therefore, to ensure that there are no unnecessary gaps in foundation degree provision and that employer needs are met. We will require:
- a coherently planned regional framework for the delivery of foundation degrees which clearly meets identified employer need, avoids nugatory competition between providers and provides seamless progression opportunities for learners;
 - articulated planning and delivery through a range of providers, particularly HEIs, FEIs and employers – and, where relevant, through partnerships of providers;
 - a central focus on employer involvement in planning, development and delivery, including with community and voluntary sector employers as appropriate, and drawing on the work of SSCs;

- a focus on upskilling the existing workforce and improving market awareness of the opportunities provided by part-time foundation degrees;
- a focus on priority sectors or evidenced need for provision.

Funding arrangements

34. The funding arrangements are as follows:

- A total of £7.64 million is available for a three year period.
- We will allocate funding on a regional basis. **We will consider no more than one proposal from each region, but this proposal may comprise a number of strands or elements, some or all of which may be funded.**
- In order to focus on upskilling the current workforce, the funding will be for part-time provision.
- Recognising the significant challenge involved in setting up these programmes, and its labour-intensive nature, up to 50% of any allocation may be for employer engagement, demand side development and the development of new foundation degree provision in response to employer need. We will expect a strong focus on improving market awareness of the part-time foundation degree to those already in employment, as well as how demand will be grown over time.
- A proportion of the available funding will be used to fund new provision in academic years 2012/13 and 2013/14. (Funding may be used to cover the student fee element; fees charged per credit should not be higher than the pro rata undergraduate fee level.)
- We will allocate funding over a three year period as follows:
 - (academic year) 2011/12 funding for development and promotion phase
 - (academic year) 2012/13 delivery of provision (student intake)
 - (academic year) 2013/14 delivery of provision (student intake).
- Maintaining this provision will remain a priority after this period of funding but, in the context of current economic pressures, we cannot guarantee the continued funding of additional student numbers for foundation degrees beyond this initial period.

Funding criteria [these are reflected in the templates for submission of proposals attached at Annexes B and C]

35. Our criteria for funding will be as follows:

- **C1** A clear fit with the regional strategies submitted in response to circular W10/16HE.
- **C2** The extent to which the proposal evidences employer need and market demand.
- **C3** The strength of the proposed partnerships between HEIs, FEIs, employers, SSCs and employer representatives; and the strength of the management structure that will underpin consortium relationships.
- **C4** The strength of proposals for employer engagement, demand side development and marketing/promotional activity.
- **C5** The extent to which proposed provision will contribute to upskilling the current workforce through part-time provision; the development of the range of students' employability skills; and the enhancement of their employment prospects. Proposals should indicate the skills that the new foundation degree provision will provide to students to equip them for future employment. They should also identify specifically what this new provision would offer that is not already provided by the proposers.
- **C6** The fit between the proposed new provision and the priorities established by the Welsh Assembly Government in relation to the strategic sectors identified in *Skills That Work for Wales* and, more recently, the Economic Renewal Programme¹¹, as well as strategic priorities such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects, Modern Foreign Languages and Welsh Medium Provision. Consideration should also be given to the skills needs of the emerging renewables sectors (as specified in HEFCW's Remit Letter 2010-11)¹².
- **C7** Where appropriate, coherence with the UHOVI (which is funding foundation degree provision in the Heads of the Valleys region) and the HEW ESF Foundation Degree and Work-Based Learning

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www.cymru.gov.uk/topics/businessandconomy/help/economicrenewal/programmepapers/anewdiraction/?jsessionid=vtYsML6bCGcBhBp9pDGP12dcrqhfndnBnXVCPs2C2TZW3C0ZnfJTH!-612830727?lang=en

¹² www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/about_he_in_wales/wag_priorities_and_policies/2010-11%20remit%20letter.pdf

Programmes (which are funding provision in the Convergence area of Wales focused on Welsh Assembly Government priority economic sectors). We will not support developments already being taken forward under these initiatives and will need areas of potential overlap/boundary/gaps to be clearly identified.

- **C8** The quality of provision and the extent to which provision will meet the requirements of the QAA benchmark, including consideration of progression routes.
- **C9** The contribution of the proposed provision to widening access into higher education, including how it will be adapted to the flexible learning needs of students.
- **C10** The overall coherence of the proposal, including its feasibility in terms of development and implementation plans; its potential to meet recruitment targets; and its value for money.

Monitoring and evaluation

36. We will set out arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of proposals once funding decisions have been confirmed.

Developmental review

37. Our intention is to commission a developmental review of foundation degree provision during the funding period, in order to inform the development of these qualifications and assess the quality of the funded provision.

Impact Assessment

38. We are committed to making equality a core issue in developing and implementing policies and services, and evaluating and refining those approaches to advance the equality agenda. We have a legal responsibility to assess the impact of our policies on equality groups and to set out how we will monitor or address any possible negative impact. The outcome of our equality impact assessment of this policy will be available on our website, www.hefcw.ac.uk.
39. A similar responsibility rests on the institutional partners within the region to assess the impact of their proposals on equality and diversity groups. When formulating your proposals you must take into account how they will address the needs of potentially disadvantaged groups (in relation to

age, disability and health, gender, race and ethnicity (including the Welsh language), religion or belief, sexual orientation).

Submission of proposals

40. Proposals should be submitted on the attached templates (Annexes B and C) by **7 January 2011** to Sheridan Nott (sheridan.nott@hefcw.ac.uk; 029 2068 2222)

Timetable

Publication of circular W10/16HE <i>Guidance for the Submission of Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education</i>	28 May 2010
Publication of circular W10/28HE <i>Regional Strategies for the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education: Funding and Support</i>	23 July 2010
Publication of HEFCW policy/strategy on foundation degrees and arrangements for the funding of new provision based on regional strategies (<i>this document</i>)	23 July 2010
Submission of regional strategies by HEIs	30 November 2010
Submission of proposals for funding of regional strategies: additional funded credits and Regional Initiatives Fund	7 January 2011
Submission of proposals for new part-time foundation degree provision, based on regional strategies (<i>invited via this document</i>)	7 January 2011
Consideration by HEFCW Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee; funding confirmed	February 2011
Funding approved by HEFCW Council	March 2011
Funding against approved proposals allocated to regions (first payments made)	March 2011
Employer engagement, demand side development and marketing/promotional activity by consortia	2011/12
Commencement of new foundation degree provision	2012/13
Continuation of new foundation degree provision	2013/14

Sector Skills Councils and the Development of Foundation Degrees in Wales

1. *Skills That Work for Wales - A Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan* clearly articulates the role of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in Wales in relation to Vocational Qualifications: the policy requires SSCs in Wales to work closely with employer bodies to strengthen the employer voice in decisions on skills provision.
2. Specifically, SSCs have been remitted to focus on:
 - demonstrably increasing employer engagement, demand for, and investment in skills;
 - undertaking national analyses of sectoral labour market and skills needs and demands; and
 - informing the development of new vocational qualifications, to ensure that they meet the needs of business.
3. SSCs are required to work with employers to draw up annual Sector Skills Assessments (SSAs) and Sector Qualification Strategies (SQSs)¹³. These documents map out exactly what skills employers expect their sector workforce to have, and the key qualifications they will need in future. The Sector Qualification Strategies and action plans produced by SSCs provide advice on the vocational qualifications that employers see as priorities for public funding, ensuring that the supply of skills is clearly informed by sector needs. In Wales, SSC Sector Qualification Strategies will be increasingly used to inform which qualifications attract public funding.
4. *Skills that Work for Wales* asked HEFCW to take account of advice from SSCs on the high-level skills needs in their sectors, based on their Sector Skills Assessments / Sector Qualification Strategies. HEFCW has since worked closely with the Alliance and with individual SSCs to that end, in particular working with the DCELLS SSC Stakeholder Group to ensure that HE priorities are clearly identified in the new Wales action plans recently drawn up for the delivery of SSC activity following relicensing.
5. Foundation degrees are recognised as vocational qualifications that can meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional levels. They are an excellent platform to progress to professional qualifications or a full honours degree, and improve progression routes

¹³ See links to individual SSC websites via www.sscalliance.org

into higher education from work-based learning frameworks such as Apprenticeships Frameworks (which are specified by SSCs). In addition to being a recognised progression route they are qualifications valued by employers, preparing learners for the world of work, and equipping them with skills that can be applied immediately in the workplace.

6. The Quality Assurance Agency's Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark states that the design and delivery of foundation degree specifications are likely to be informed by the Foundation Degree Frameworks of appropriate SSCs (and we recognise that there will be specific needs and priorities in Wales), as well as by other reference points. The design of the foundation degree specifications should be driven by employers to enable foundation degree developments to be mapped against Labour Market Intelligence (including Skills Foresight Activity), agreed Occupational Standards and Learning Outcomes. Indicative content specifications will need to take account of the different contexts in which a provider would work with employers on a national or regional basis. This would enable a much more in depth understanding of the business case and geographical demand for a foundation degree.
7. The role of SSCs is to advise on whether any proposed foundation degree fits with Sector Qualification Strategies to meet the needs of business, and articulates with lower/higher level qualifications to support seamless progression routes. To this end, SSCs are a critical component of the current HEW ESF Foundation Degree and Work-Based Learning Programmes.