

HEFCW Corporate Strategy 2013-17

Review of broader higher education context and performance against the last strategy

Our Corporate Strategy 2013-17, commencing in April 2013 following extensive consultation and engagement, continued the delivery of the Welsh Government's 21st century strategy for higher education (HE), For our Future¹. A new Policy Statement for Higher Education² was published in June 2013 which set out the new Minister for Education and Skills' priorities for HE. We therefore needed to implement our Strategy taking account of the new emphasis.

From 2012/13 new higher level tuition fees were introduced in HE for full-time undergraduate and PGCE students. In Wales, additional tuition fee grant support was provided for Welsh domiciled students, wherever they chose to study, utilising HEFCW's recurrent grant. The increasing costs of the tuition grant, including following the movement of the grant from HEFCW to the Welsh Government in April 2015, meant a reduction in HEFCW's funding for HE in Wales. This meant that the levers available to incentivise autonomous higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliver Welsh Government priorities, which the market would not otherwise deliver, were very substantially diminished. The introduction of the new Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 sought to address this deficit by developing HEFCW's role as a HE regulator. The Act focusses on financial management; quality; student fees; and access to HE. The transitional period for implementation of the Act, 2015-17 continues. During the Strategy period HEFCW has worked closely with regulated institutions, which include universities and some further education institutions (FEIs), and others to put in place a regulatory framework covering those areas, together with a statement of how we would intervene in the case of breaches of regulation.

During the period 2014-16, Professor Sir Ian Diamond was invited by the Welsh Government to conduct an independent review of HE funding and student finance arrangements. His report was published in September 2016 and the Welsh Government responded in November 2016 together with a consultation on proposals for future arrangements. We look forward to working with the Welsh Government to implement the final proposals³.

In 2016, the usual quinquennial governmental review of HEFCW as a public body was replaced by the 'Review of the oversight of post-compulsory education in Wales, with special reference to the future role and function of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)'. The report of the Review, conducted by Professor Ellen Hazelkorn, 'Towards 2030: A framework for building a world-class post-compulsory system for Wales' was published in March 2016⁴ and the Welsh Government responded to the

¹ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/091214hestrategyen.pdf>

² <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/130611-statement-en.pdf>

³ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/highereducation/review-of-he-funding-and-student-finance-arrangements/?lang=en>

⁴ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160310-hazelkorn-report-en.pdf>

report recommendations by proposing the establishment of a single, strategic authority.⁵ At the time of writing the consultation has just been published on establishing a new Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales to provide oversight, strategic direction and leadership for the post-compulsory education and training sector.

Widening Access

Our objective was to secure inclusion, progression and success in HE for people of all ages with the potential to benefit from higher level learning and skills. This responded to the Welsh Government's priority for social justice. During the period of the Strategy we have seen improvement in both targets which relate to wider access, namely improved recruitment from Communities First/Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) areas in Wales and improved recruitment from UK areas of low participation. In addition, during the period Wales has performed well in the UK performance indicators for widening participation.⁶

In the light of this improved widening access performance, it is encouraging to see that full-time retention has improved during the period, signalling improved success for students, including those from widening access backgrounds. We commissioned an evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of widening access activities in Wales⁷ and guidance to providers.

During the period of the Strategy, we managed the fee and access plan approval process. Since 2012/13, fee and access plan investment in equality of opportunity and promotion of HE has increased from £63,712,000 to £94,131,350 in 2016/17.

We consulted on and published our Strategic Equality Plan in April 2016, covering the period to 2020. We publish annual reports on performance against the Plan, including working with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, as the Welsh Government regulator, to support universities to meet and go beyond equalities duties.

Our declining grant has meant that opportunities for expanding HE in further education progression and part-time provision have been limited. However, this period has seen developing relationships between HEIs and FEIs through franchise, group arrangements, dual sector structures and through the innovative University of the Heads of the Valley Institute (UHOVI). While our aim remains to see improved part-time opportunities offered, we recognise the overall reductions at UK level in part-time recruitment. We continued our part-time funding during the Strategy period, including support for the Open University, recognising that student funding impacted significantly on that part-time only provider, and we refreshed our part-time fee waiver scheme to support social mobility and widen access, taking account of new Welsh Government part-time student support arrangements. Our part-time target, which compares annual growth in part-time with the UK position, has been met in most years of the Strategy.

⁵ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/review-of-the-oversight-and-regulation-of-post-compulsory-education-and-training-in-wales/?lang=en>

⁶ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/widening-participation>

⁷ [http://wiserd.ac.uk/files/4014/4257/0990/WISERD - Access to Higher Education F1.pdf](http://wiserd.ac.uk/files/4014/4257/0990/WISERD_-_Access_to_Higher_Education_F1.pdf);
www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/policy_areas/widening_access/HEFCWs%20Widening%20Access%20To%20OHE%20Guidance%20English%20Interactive.pdf

Despite funding reductions, we have been able to continue to support regional working through the HEFCW Reaching Wider Programme. The three Reaching Wider partnerships in Wales have demonstrated effective partnership working, including with partner FEIs, targeted schools and Schools Consortia. Reaching Wider Partnerships have been increasingly focussed on long-term engagement in Communities First and Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation areas and with supporting looked after children and care leavers to tackle poverty and increase educational aspirations and skills⁸.

Student Experience

Our aim in this area is to secure excellent quality HE and student experience, enhanced by the student voice. During the period of this Strategy results for Wales in the National Student Survey (NSS) have failed to increase to the same extent as in England. This means that our target in this area, which is comparative to the UK, has not been met. However, we have seen a big improvement in performance in 2016 and expect that the outcome of this target will be favourable.

We have continued to work positively with NUS Wales, including providing support for the Wise Wales partnership. Student partnership has been reflected strongly in taking forward policy in this area, with students represented on our Council and relevant committees and working groups. We have also developed a Memorandum of Understanding with NUS Wales, to enable us to collaborate more effectively. During the period of this Strategy we have refreshed our work on student charters and on relationship agreements between HE providers and their students. We have set expectations for student engagement in Fee and Access Planning. We introduced a student-focussed mid-cycle review into our quality assessment arrangements, building on the annual quality report from the student body.

We refreshed our Strategy for enhancing learning and teaching through technology, and published a series of case studies on the outcomes to date. We supported the sector in their work in developing Open Education Resources, which saw Wales becoming one of the first nations to fully embed the concept of 'open education' within a national strategy. In recognition of this, Wales hosted the OER 2015 conference.

This period has seen a growth in funding for the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, which was established in 2012/13 and we have seen an increase in the range of provision offered through the medium of Welsh. Performance against the Welsh medium target has been improving and we are likely to meet the 5 credit target. The evaluation of the Coleg, undertaken by OldBell 3 in 2014 concluded that significant progress had been made in broadening and extending the range of Welsh medium study opportunities for students in Wales. At the time of writing the Coleg is under review by a task and finish group established by the Welsh Government.

We have continued to work with Welsh Government, Estyn and providers of initial teacher training to improve quality and recruitment. However, our ability to provide funding support, with associated policy leverage, in this area has declined from nearly £12m in 2011/12 to around £11,000 in 2015/16, recruitment targets have not been met and we have seen problems identified in Estyn inspections of ITT during this period,

⁸www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/policy_areas/widening_access/HEFCW%20Widening%20Access%20Delivering%20for%20Wales%20English.pdf

which we are working with providers and Estyn to address. More recently, it has been agreed that the accreditation function should move to the Education Workforce Council.

During the period of the Strategy all HEIs being reviewed met UK thresholds for quality and standards in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Institutional Review, with one area of commendation. As in England, some FEIs required additional work to achieve meets expectations outcomes, but one FEI gained a commendation. Quality assessment arrangements have been under review in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and we have developed a new Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. This allows our HE providers flexibility to align with arrangements in England, including the option to apply for the Teaching Excellence Framework, taking account of the needs of Wales.

We have actively contributed to the further development of international activity by universities in Wales, by working alongside Universities Wales, the British Council Wales, and the Welsh Government, as a member of the Global Wales partnership, including through the provision of early data on international student recruitment. This superseded the International Action Plan, and was successfully launched in November 2015. HE providers in Wales have faced significant global market and UK policy challenges which have impacted on international student and staff recruitment and retention. The strategic measure for internationalisation has therefore seen fluctuations in progress during this period; it was exceeded in 2013/14, although not met in most years. As in all policy areas, we have engaged with institutions on internationalisation through our Strategic Planning and Institutional Risk Review processes, providing feedback where relevant. At UK level, we engage through the UUK's International Strategic Advisory Board, and through steering production of [The Scale and Scope of UK HE Transnational Education](#) with HEGlobal. Our Fee and Access Planning process has provided specific information on HE providers' international partnership arrangements.

Skills, Employability and Enterprise

During the period of this Strategy, we implemented the Agreement on Skills and Employability overseen by a collaborative Skills and Employability Board. Transfer of funding from another programme enabled us to put an additional £1m into the three priorities of the Agreement: work placements/work experience; employer approved courses; and curriculum embedded employability training and development. Each institution was asked to produce a skills and employability action plan for a two year period, 2013/14 and 2014/15, underpinned by proposals for new and innovative activities or pilot programmes which would enhance skills and employability and increase the employability prospects of graduates from Welsh institutions. In order to secure funding, initiatives had to be sustainable and collaborative and show that consideration was being given to widening access aims.

The outcomes of that work were monitored and resulted in a successful conference in 2015 and a publication of good practice, [Insight into Employability: How Welsh Universities Hone Graduate Skills](#)⁹. Institutions have mainstreamed activity developed during this period.

⁹www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/policy_areas/business_and_communities/Insight%20into%20Employability%20e%20publication.pdf

During the period of the Strategy the GO Wales: Skills for the Knowledge Economy programme concluded. The programme was part-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) in the Convergence Area of Wales and by HEFCW via its core grant in the Competitiveness Area of Wales. The programme supported the deployment, development and retention of graduates' high-level skills, knowledge and innovative potential in businesses in Wales, particularly small and medium sized businesses. During its lifetime (January 2009 to December 2014), the programme, a partnership of HEFCW as lead sponsor and the universities in Wales, excepting the Open University in Wales, worked with over 7,600 HE students and graduates and supported over 2300 employers. The programme provided over 4300 paid placements for students and graduates and more than 2400 short, unpaid work experience opportunities as well as over 400 places on the Graduate Academy, a blend of training and work experience designed to help graduates who were finding it difficult to access graduate level employment. We provided over 390 places on our Freelancer Academy, training for graduates who wanted to explore or take the first steps towards a freelance career. In addition, the Programme provided 1300 match funded opportunities for graduates employed in SMEs to undertake training. An evaluation of the programme is available on the HEFCW web site.¹⁰

From early 2014, HEFCW worked closely with the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) to develop a successor programme to GO Wales: Skills for the Knowledge Economy. A new programme, GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience, was approved by WEFO for delivery from 1 April 2016. The programme is part funded by ESF in West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales and is a partnership of HEFCW (lead beneficiary) and all of the universities in Wales, including the Open University in Wales (joint beneficiaries).

The programme aims to work intensively with a small number of young students on HE courses who are most at risk of being not in employment, education or training on leaving their HE course. The project aims to use tailored, individualised work experience interventions as the basis for enhancing the employability skills and attributes of those students who need additional employability support so that they can use their skills, knowledge and talent to the benefit of the Welsh economy. The programme has been funded for three years and aims to work with over 2000 students. For more information, please go to www.gowales.co.uk.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Welsh Studies and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) were identified as subjects of a broader importance in Wales. We funded Reaching Wider STEM pathways programmes to support the increase of widening access students achieving STEM qualifications. Given the importance of computing skills to the Welsh economy and the spotlight on early employment outcomes for graduates in this field, computing has been a particular interest of ours and we have taken forward discussions with HEIs around the employability of students in that subject area. We undertook a survey of Welsh Studies and hosted an event to discuss the survey returns and the concept further. The Learned Society has subsequently taken forward Welsh Studies as a Society theme. We funded CILT Cymru to continue with the Routes Cymru programme to promote the uptake of MFL in Wales. HEFCW Funding has ended but we continue to be represented on the Routes Cymru steering group and work with relevant stakeholders to take forward the redefined Routes Cymru programme.

¹⁰ www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy_areas/business_and_communities/go_wales.aspx

We have supported Wales to maximise its engagement with outward mobility opportunities for its HE students and staff through our membership of the Erasmus+ Wales Country Advisory Group, and Universities UK's Outward Mobility Network.

Performance of institutions in Wales in the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, which collects data about the destinations of graduates six months after graduation, has generally been strong, particularly when measured against overall UK performance for graduates in employment, in education or training or in employment *and* education or training, but it has dropped recently. The position in terms of graduate level employment has been generally less strong but with some impressive outturns nevertheless.

Our target for increasing continuing professional development offered by HEIs in Wales has been exceeded and has resulted in almost 250,000 learner days delivered by Welsh HEIs.

Innovation and Engagement

Up to 2013/14 we provided Innovation and Engagement Funding (IEF) to all HEIs in support of activities that stimulated and directed the application and exploitation of knowledge to the benefit of the social, cultural and economic development of our society. Our Corporate Strategy aimed to ensure that knowledge exchange between HE, employers and the wider community, both in Wales and further afield, was as effective as possible. Innovation and Engagement Strategies submitted by institutions provided accountability for the use of public funding through the establishment and reporting of key targets

We maintained our focus on the strengthening of regional or national partnerships through the funding of a suite of collaborative projects up to 2014/15. These projects pursued Welsh Government ambitions in terms of collaboration across the HE sector (eg Strategic Insight Programme) or within regions of Wales (eg Dragon Innovation Programme, CADARN Skills Centre). Some were developed to complement specific Welsh Government activity or funding streams (IP-Commercialisation Project; Enterprise Support Programme) or to formalise partnership with local authorities (Driving Innovation and Enterprise in the Cardiff City Region).

HEFCW and Welsh Government worked strategically to operate a "dual funding" approach, whereby HEFCW funding provided infrastructure support to underpin the specific project activity funded by the Welsh Government via its Academic Expertise for Business (or A4B) Programme. We withdrew our IEF funding stream from 2013/14 as a consequence of the introduction of Full-Time Undergraduate Fee Grants. However, our new Strategic Planning process allowed institutions to confirm their long-term commitment to knowledge exchange and commercialisation activity, in accordance with the Welsh Government's innovation strategy, *Innovation Wales*, and as a condition of future Welsh Government support. We also contributed core funding to the National Centre for Universities and Business, established to support and promote world-class collaboration between universities and business across the UK.

The total amount of collaborative research income rose from £65.3m in 2011/12 to £74.2m in 2015/16 as measured by HE-BCI Survey data. Contrary to the position elsewhere in the UK, HE-BCI indicators are no longer used to drive funding allocations in

Wales. However, we remain committed to continued monitoring of HE-BCI Survey data. Universities in Wales continue to use the data in benchmarking their performance and include HE-BCI indicators in their reporting to HEFCW. Moreover, HE-BCI data is of continuing interest to the UK Government's Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and to the Welsh Government in monitoring the impact of European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) programmes, including the new SMART Expertise innovation funding programme. We have therefore worked with our universities to encourage a more robust and consistent approach to the submission of their data. We continue to help the Welsh Government to monitor the delivery of EU investments in Wales through our membership of the Wales Programme Monitoring Committee for European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020).

We have continued to encourage institutions in their cultural and civic role: HEFCW is a signatory to the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research and jointly funds the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement. We have actively contributed to the further development of international activity by universities in Wales, as a member of the Global Wales partnership.

Despite the lack of HEFCW infrastructure funding, HE institutions in Wales continue to demonstrate strong performance in terms of their partnerships with public and private sector organisations.

Research

We are committed to securing sustainable excellent research which stands comparison internationally. The Welsh HE sector performed strongly in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), a UK-wide assessment of research quality. It achieved the Corporate Strategy target of increasing the proportion of 4* and 3* from 14% and 35% respectively in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. In the 2014 REF, 30% of the submitted research was assessed as world-leading (4*) and a further 47% was assessed as internationally excellent (3*). Welsh universities performed particularly well on the new impact element of assessment, with 49% of the submitted material being judged as 4*, the highest proportion of any part of the UK.

From 2015/16 onwards, we have allocated our research funding (QR) on the basis of the outcomes of the 2014 REF. We revised the allocation method by increasing the combined quality/volume threshold in order to ensure that funding is focused on sustainable research excellence. Throughout the period, the Council gave priority to maintaining QR funding at a time when the HE budget was under severe pressure because of the costs of the undergraduate tuition fee grant.

We have worked with Welsh Government throughout the period to help implement the Sêr Cymru programme, with a view to increasing the sector's access to Research Council and other sources of external funding. The first phase of the programme (Sêr Cymru I), which commenced in 2013, is supporting four Research Chairs and three National Research Networks in the *Science for Wales* Grand Challenge areas. HEFCW is contributing around 30% of the funding. We have also agreed to contribute funding for the second phase (Sêr Cymru II), which will support Research Fellows and rising stars. The additional investment provided by the Sêr Cymru programme is intended to help address the shortfall in the number of STEM researchers in Wales.

Recognising the importance of postgraduates to the future of the Welsh economy and the success of the research base, we have continued to provide support for postgraduate research through our PGR funding stream.

We have worked with other bodies across the UK to implement a range of Concordats that support the effective management of research in relation to career development, public engagement and research integrity. We have introduced a requirement for institutions to confirm compliance with the Concordat on Research Integrity through HEFCW's Annual Assurance Statement. We are also working with the other HE funding bodies to incorporate requirements for open access publication into the next REF.

The Corporate Strategy included a target for the annual percentage change in Research Council income for Welsh HEIs to exceed the equivalent figure for the UK as a whole (excluding the golden triangle). Performance against this target has been variable but the sector met this target in 2015/16.

As a founding member of Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB), we have continued to support universities to maximise their engagement with EU research and innovation funding opportunities. We have advised the Welsh Government on potential impacts to the HE system from the UK's withdrawal from the EU and in relation to EU transitional planning, including through our membership of the HE Brexit Group established by the Cabinet Secretary.

Reconfiguration and Collaboration

The Corporate Strategy included a target of at least 75% of the Welsh HEIs to have an annual income in excess of the UK median, with no institution to be in the lower quartile by 2015/16. Recent institutional mergers were largely completed by the start of the Strategy period, with the percentage of institutions with an income of over the UK median remaining at 50% throughout the Strategy period. One institution remains in the lower quartile. We continued to monitor the implementation of mergers and collaboration in this Strategy period.

During the period of the Strategy we have refreshed our approach to regional working, taking account of the Welsh Government's introduction of three regional structures in Wales. HE providers are represented on the city deal partnerships and work closely with the regional skills partnerships.

Governance

The Corporate Strategy included a target 'no higher education institution to be classified as 'high risk' in accordance with HEFCW institutional risk review processes. One institution has been classified as 'high risk' since September 2013. The 'high risk' rating for that institution had resulted from issues caused by a lack of capacity to respond to major changes in the funding environment and in student demand. HEFCW has worked closely with the institution concerned during the Strategy period. Whilst many of the issues have since been addressed, at the time of writing that institution currently remains at a 'high risk' rating. One further institution has been classified as 'high risk' more recently and HEFCW continues to work closely with the institution on areas of concern.

HEFCW continues to monitor the financial performance and forecasts of institutions; estates management data; and performance in relation to sustainable development. We also analyse the Strategic Planning and Engagement Documents (SPEDs) and annual monitoring reports submitted by institutions. This information is used in institutional risk review processes and to inform HEFCW's Council regarding institutional performance.

Organisational Effectiveness

HEFCW is the public body that sits between universities and the Welsh Government and has continued to distribute resources for higher education teaching and research and to help deliver Welsh Government priorities for higher education for the wider benefit of society, Welsh culture and the economy.

As set out earlier in our comments on the outcomes of the strategy, HEFCW's statutory responsibilities have evolved over the period of the strategy following the introduction of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015. A two-year transitional period for HEFCW's duties under the new Act commenced in September 2015 and they will be fully implemented from 1 September 2017. As a result, we now regulate full time undergraduate fee levels, ensure a framework is in place for assessing the quality of higher education, and scrutinise the financial, governance and risk performance of regulated institutions. As well as teaching and research, we fund other activities at Welsh universities and fund higher education courses at some further education colleges.

Over the course of the strategy period, we have worked closely with regulated institutions, including universities, some further education institutions and others to put in place a regulatory framework to meet the requirements of the new Act as well as a statement of how we would intervene in the case of breaches of regulation. We have continued to work closely in partnership with HE and FE institutions, the HE and FE sector bodies, funded bodies and other organisations to support and advance higher education in Wales, the UK and internationally.

As levels of funding for HE from the Welsh Government have diminished over the period of the strategy, we have regularly consulted with HE providers and used robust transparent funding methods to make best use of the available financial resources available to us, for the benefit of the sector.

In terms of our statutory responsibilities in relation to equality and diversity, we have published our Strategic Equality Plans for the periods 2012-13 to 2015-16 and more recently for the period 2016-2020. HEFCW publishes an annual report on its website on progress made with the objectives from the Strategic Equality Plans. These plans cover the HE sector's performance as well as HEFCW's. In March 2016, HEFCW published its new Strategic Equality Plan for the period 2016-17 to 2020, following consultation and approval by Council. Underpinning the new Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20, we have developed an annual delivery plan, which enables us to be agile in our response to emerging priorities.

Our statutory responsibilities in respect of freedom of information requests and data protection have been delivered throughout the strategy period by ensuring our related policies and procedures have been kept up to date with the latest legislation and best practice.

With regard to sustainable development, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 come into force in 2016, although the legislation had been under development for the previous three years. HEFCW was an active member of the working group charged with contributing to the structure of the Act, which met extensively during 2014 and 2015. Reports on the development of the legislation and actions to support compliance were regularly presented to Council between November 2014 and March 2017. An internal action plan to support implementation of the Act was agreed in January 2016 and this has included changes to the governance of committees and Council to include the sustainable development principle and planned alterations to internal governance to ensure that the requirements of the Act are reflected in internal human resource policies. HEFCW has also completed a review of its impact assessment process and is currently using a new process to further support the embedding of the legislation. Our well-being objectives and our statement of well-being were published by 31 March 2017.

In furthering our aim to be an employer of choice, HEFCW strives to demonstrate how it values its employees and acknowledges that they are its most important assets. In doing so, during the period covered by this corporate strategy, HEFCW has successfully retained its Investors in People status. HEFCW strives for continuous improvement and frequently reviews its operations and functions to ensure that the support is in place for both HEFCW and the employees to deliver to a high standard. In conducting Staff Attitude Surveys every two years, the results feed into an organisational action plan and progress against actions is monitored frequently. HEFCW promotes diversity; is a member of the South East Wales Equality Network; is registered as 'Disability Confident' (formerly 'Two Ticks'), and welcomes applicants from all areas of the community. In its recruitment, HEFCW operates within best practice processes and promotes fair and open competition in line with Civil Service Recruitment Principles. Our favourable terms and conditions of employment and the commitment displayed by employees has resulted in extremely low staff turnover rates and we have successfully retained talent to deliver our objectives.