

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Consultation on the collection of data for the 'basket of goods'

Date: 22 August 2017
Reference: W17/21HE
To: Regulated institutions in Wales and their student unions
Funded institutions in Wales and their student unions
Other interested parties
Response by: 06 October 2017
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In March 2017 HEFCW was remitted to work with Welsh Government officials to "compile and publish on an annual basis the prices of a basket of goods, to be agreed with Government, for each institution."

This circular provides a consultation on the collection and monitoring of data for the 'basket of goods'.

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Introduction

1. In March 2017 HEFCW was remitted to work with Welsh Government officials to “compile and publish on an annual basis the prices of a basket of goods, to be agreed with Government, for each institution.”
2. This circular provides a consultation on the collection and monitoring of data for the ‘basket of goods’.

Background

3. In September 2016 the [Independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements](#), the “Diamond Review”, published its final report and recommendations.
4. One key recommendation of the Diamond Review was that students undertaking higher education (HE) in Wales should not experience increases in costs for institutional goods or services (such as accommodation) as a negative consequence of the other proposals made by the Review. The Review recommended that HEFCW should “annually, collect the prices of a basket of goods for each university and publish them.”
5. In November 2016 the Welsh Government published its response to the recommendations of the Diamond Review in which it accepted the majority of the recommendations, including the recommendation to publish the ‘basket of goods’. This task was subsequently included in HEFCW’s remit letter 2017-18 which was published in March 2017.
6. HEFCW officers met with Welsh Government officials in May 2017 to discuss the proposed items for the ‘basket of goods’ and the principles by which the data could be collected and published.
7. HEFCW’s Council discussed the proposed arrangements for the ‘basket of goods’ task at its May meeting, including the proposed list of ‘goods’ for the ‘basket’.

Costs of study

8. In March 2010 HEFCW published circular [W10/07HE](#) which outlined its guidance on the provision of information to students and prospective students on the cost of HE study, with particular reference to mandatory, necessarily incurred and optional costs.
9. The guidance recommended that:
 - All institutions should make information on the cost of study available electronically, via their websites, while also taking account of their accessibility policies and the legal context of the information provided;

- The information provided should be in the form of estimates, and accurate at the time of publication, as changes in the economy could impact on some of the costs (eg accommodation costs, exchange rates);
 - Information on costs should be updated at least annually, and should identify the date of the most recent review, in order that students can take account of any changes in the economy when estimating their costs;
 - Institutions should indicate which costs are likely to apply to part-time students;
 - Institutions should provide links from the information on cost of study to
 - information on financial support available and eligibility for such support.
10. The guidance has since been superseded by that of the [Consumer and Markets Authority](#) (CMA) and institutions are reminded that they need to comply with the CMA guidance to HE institutions on students' rights in consumer law, which states that:
- students should be given clear, accurate and timely information that they need in order to make an informed decision about what and where to study;
 - students should be provided with the right information at the right time.
11. The 'basket of goods' was discussed at the May 2017 meeting of HEFCW's Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee (SOAC) which reaffirmed the importance of the CMA guidance in relation to the provision of accurate and timely information to current and prospective students.
12. HEFCW officers met with NUS Wales (NUSW) officers in June 2017 to discuss the proposals for the 'basket of goods' data collection and the potential impact on the diverse student body.
13. In keeping with the holistic approach of the Diamond Review, and in response to issues raised by NUSW, HEFCW has considered how the 'costs of study' at discipline level could be incorporated into the 'basket of goods'.
14. HEFCW concluded that it would not be possible to include subject or discipline level costs, for the following reasons:
- costs arising from field trips are likely to vary with location, which may change from year to year, and much of the cost would be outside the control of the institution;
 - costs arising from equipment are likely to be outside the control of the institution;
 - textbook costs vary greatly between programmes of study and according to required reading lists.

15. The focus of the 'basket of goods' task is on institution-wide information, in order to enable HEFCW to monitor whether these costs are rising at a rate above inflation over time. The information collected is not directly intended for a student audience. In light of the meeting with NUS Wales which considered this matter, HEFCW subsequently agreed with Welsh Government officials that the information in the 'basket of goods' would not be published, although the information should all be available publicly.
16. It would be good practice for institutions to include a calculator, or similar mechanism, on their websites to enable students to identify and calculate the full range of other costs of study, as well as signposting links to support and advice on budgeting and basic financial planning.

Basket of Goods items

17. HEFCW proposes that the 'basket of goods' should be prepared in line with the following principles:
 - Costs should generally be at the institutional level and under the institution's control, and institutions should have the opportunity to identify where costs are outside of their control (e.g. car parking);
 - These costs should be monitored over time on an individual institutional basis and not used as a comparator between institutions;
 - Costs should be monitored on an annual basis;
 - Costs should, as far as possible, be identified from publicly available information which is robust and accurate, including information which is published in line with CMA requirements;
 - A contact point for each institution should be identified who would be contacted to confirm the accuracy of the data.

Q1: Do you agree with the proposed principles? Please explain your response.

18. HEFCW proposes to include the following items in the 'basket of goods':
 - Accommodation which is owned and managed by the institution;
 - Membership of Students' Unions and/or clubs and societies;
 - Fees for the use of gyms or sports centres;
 - the additional cost (on top of accommodation) resulting from a student taking a fully catered option for accommodation;
 - Library costs (including fines);
 - Printing and photocopying costs, including the costs of binding theses or dissertations;
 - Car parking fees;
 - Ticket costs for Graduation ceremony tickets (guests) and reception events (guests and students);
 - Crèche or day-care costs for facilities owned and operated by the institution.

Q2: Do you agree with the contents of the proposed 'basket of goods'? Please explain your response.

Fee levels

19. The Welsh Government and NUSW are interested in the monitoring of information on part-time and postgraduate fee levels, which are not currently regulated.
20. HEFCW considers that this is a complex area as the fees are likely to vary by course and mode of study. This means that it would not be possible to represent them as an institution-wide cost in the 'basket of goods'. HEFCW therefore considers that this information on fees might best be collected and monitored separately to the 'basket of goods'.
21. HEFCW proposes to collate this data using already established sources such as the Tuition Fee Benchmarking Toolkit from The Knowledge Partnership, the Student Loans Company and institutional websites, or collected through the HESA student record. This exercise could be undertaken using the same principles as of the 'basket of goods' exercise as outlined above.

Q3 Do you think that part-time and postgraduate tuition fees should be collected and monitored separately from the 'basket of goods'? How should this information be collected? Should it be published?

Data collection and monitoring

22. The collection of 'basket of goods' data would be co-ordinated by HEFCW officers on an annual basis. We would provide the collated data to institutional contacts for review and to confirm the data are accurate. The name of the nominated institutional contact would be collected annually via the request for names of authorised signatories and data contacts sent to the Vice-Chancellor or Principal each year.
23. In order to reduce the administrative burden on institutions in relation to the 'basket of goods' exercise, HEFCW officers would collate the data using information from institutional websites or other published sources. Where data were not available, for example if there was an item which was available for the majority of institutions but not all, we would collect the missing information directly from institutions. We propose that any data collection is undertaken via the higher education students early statistics (HESES) survey. In the first year of collection, if the timing on decisions about the 'basket of goods' does not allow this, we may carry out a separate survey.

24. HEFCW would monitor the outcomes of the 'basket of goods' exercise and provide an annual report to its Council and Welsh Government officials.

Q4 Do you agree with the proposed arrangements for data capture and subsequent monitoring for the 'basket of goods'?

Q5 Are there any other issues or unintended consequences (such as technical issues of data collection) regarding the 'basket of goods' which you would like to bring to our attention? If so, please provide details.

Q6 Do the proposals have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity (including protected characteristics), the Welsh language, sustainability or the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?

Responses to

25. Please send responses to Nicola Hunt (tel 029 2085 9735; email nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk) by 6 October 2017.

Assessing the impact of our policies

26. We have carried out an impact assessment screening and have used the outcomes to inform this consultation to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We have also considered the impact of the procedure on the Welsh language and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.