

TEF National contextual statement for Wales

Overall policy and responsibility

Responsibility for higher education (HE) in Wales is devolved. In addition to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales's (HEFCW's) role as a funder under the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, the [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) details its changed powers and enhanced role as a statutory regulator of HE in Wales. HEFCW's regulatory role has specific duties relating to:

- approving fee and access plans
- monitoring compliance with, and the effectiveness of, approved fee and access plans
- assessing the quality of education
- preparing, consulting on, and monitoring compliance with a [Financial Management Code](#)
- providing information and advice to Welsh ministers.

HEFCW has produced a [Statement of Intervention](#) to detail its intervention functions relating to the 2015 Act.

Welsh language

The Welsh language has official status in Wales, as set out in the [Welsh Language Act 1993](#) and [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#). This means that the Welsh language should not be treated less favourably than the English language in Wales. The Measure also establishes the principle that persons in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of Welsh if they choose. [A Welsh Language Commissioner](#) was established as part of this Measure. A number of courses can currently be studied partly or wholly through the medium of Welsh, with over 6,784 students studying five or more credits in Welsh (of whom nearly 2,860 are studying 40 or more credits in Welsh) (HESA 2015/16 figures).

Institutions must offer opportunities, wherever possible, for assessment to take place through the medium of Welsh, irrespective of the language in which teaching takes place. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has set out [Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition](#). The most effective means for ensuring judgements on these assessments are reliable and valid is to enable them by appointing internal and external examiners who are linguistically and academically competent to make judgements on the original Welsh-language text.

Role of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (National Welsh College)

The Coleg was established to ensure more study opportunities for Welsh-medium HE students, in partnership with universities. Its work includes training, developing and supporting Welsh-medium lecturers; funding undergraduate and post-graduate scholarships; promoting progression from school and FE into HE Welsh medium study; developing new Welsh medium HE provision in partnership with universities and increasing the numbers of students studying part or all of their course through the medium of Welsh.

Fees and student support

Up to and including 2017/18, full-time undergraduate and PGCE Welsh-domiciled students can access a fee grant towards their tuition fees in any country of the UK, with European Union-domiciled students able to access the fee grant if they are studying in Wales. Universities Wales has published [A short guide to university funding and student finance in Wales](#). These arrangements are changing in 2018/19 in response to the outcomes of the [Independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements \(the Diamond Review\)](#).

From 2019/20 onwards the Welsh Government will be providing additional means-tested support for postgraduate taught (PGT) Masters students, which will be administered through the Student Loans Company (SLC). The details of this scheme are not yet finalised. In the interim period, in 2018/19, the Welsh Government is providing an interim package of support to students, through HEFCW. HEFCW will allocate this funding to Welsh HE providers to provide students with additional funding support for their PGT Masters costs. It will be for the individual providers to determine how that funding allocation is distributed to their students ([Interim PGT Masters Support Package for AY 2018/19](#)). This will be in addition to a postgraduate loan, administered by the SLC, which is available from AY 2017/18 to Welsh domiciled students studying throughout the UK ([Support for Students on PG Masters Degrees](#)).

To access student support, regulated institutions must have an annually-approved Fee and Access Plan. To apply for a Fee and Access Plan they must be an institution, a charity, provide HE, be wholly or mainly located in Wales, and provide information on financial viability, organisation and management of financial affairs, and quality of education. The [2018/19 Fee and Access Plan guidance](#) is publicly available. If an institution's Fee and Access Plan is approved then it becomes a regulated institution, and all of its provision is automatically designated for student support as included in HEFCW's quality responsibilities.

Overview of HE provision in Wales

In Wales in 2017/18 there are:

- a. Eight HEFCW-funded and regulated higher education institutions (HEIs).
- b. The Open University in Wales (not included in data below).
- c. Three HEFCW-funded further education institutions (FEIs) operating validated HE provision, of whom two are regulated.
- d. Two regulated further education institutions (FEIs) ¹.

In 2017, 29.4 per cent of 18-year-olds living in Wales entered higher education².

In 2015-16, 76 per cent of undergraduate students in Wales were studying full-time, and 24 per cent were studying part-time³. In 2015-16, the proportions of

¹ Under the 2015 Act any FEI meeting the requirements for a Fee and Access Plan can apply to become a regulated institution. Currently two of the FEIs with validated provision are regulated, but more may wish to apply in the future.

² Source: UCAS 2017 End of Cycle Report, available at www.ucas.com. Based on undergraduate applicants via UCAS member providers only.

³ Source: HEFCE analysis of the 2015-16 Higher Education Statistics Agency standard registration population. Based on all undergraduates registered at UK HEIs only.

undergraduate students (inclusive of Open University in Wales) studying full and part-time in Wales comprised 8 per cent from the UK, 4 per cent from the European Union and 8 per cent international⁴.

Currently only three FEIs in Wales have HE provision funded by HEFCW, as HEFCW's approach has been to encourage HE in further education via franchise partnerships. Under the 2015 Act any FEI meeting the requirements for a Fee and Access Plan can apply to become a regulated institution.

HEFCW published [Guidance on partnership arrangements for franchise education provided on behalf of regulated institutions in Wales](#).

Currently, no alternative providers are regulated institutions with Fee and Access Plans.

The past four years have seen a significant growth in the number of people undertaking higher level apprenticeships in Wales. However, the majority of these are at level 4, with only a handful of apprenticeship frameworks in Wales being at levels 6 and 7. This is an area in Wales that will develop over the coming years.

Quality assessment

HEFCW's statutory position for quality is set out under the 2015 Act, which requires HEFCW to assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the quality of all education provided in Wales by or on behalf of each regulated institution.

Changes are being made to quality assessment in Wales, including the development of a [Quality Assessment Framework](#), which aligns with quality assessment in England and Northern Ireland. As part of this, governing bodies of regulated institutions will need to commission (at least every six years) an external quality assessment review from a body on the [European Quality Assurance Register](#), which complies with the [European Standards and Guidelines](#). In May 2017, Universities Wales invited the QAA to be the external quality assurance reviewer on behalf of all universities in Wales from the 2017/18 academic year. Welsh Vice-Chancellors agreed that the QAA was the most appropriate organisation to undertake the external quality reviews in Wales. This was because it was the only organisation on the register who not only understood the context of Wales within the UK and had appropriate Welsh language capacity, it also had the reputation and international reach that is important as the quality environment across the UK undergoes a transformation. The first review in Wales under this approach in 2017/18.

The Department for Education publication [Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework](#) October 2017 sets out in more detail the eligibility criteria for the Teaching Excellence Framework.

Widening access and participation

Widening access, inclusion, progression and success are key priorities for the Welsh Government and HEFCW. Widening access policies support equality of opportunity and promote higher education for people of all ages who are under-represented in

⁴ Source: HEFCE analysis of the 2015-16 HESA standard registration population. Based on all undergraduates registered at UK HEIs only.

higher education with potential to benefit from it. Widening access to HE, higher level learning and skills makes a significant contribution to the society and economy of Wales, and supports social justice, social mobility and economic upskilling.

In its Corporate Strategy to 2017, HEFCW aligned its widening access policy developments with the Welsh Government's anti-poverty strategy, [Communities First](#). HEFCW set national targets for Welsh universities to increase the number of people in higher education from Communities First areas. The Welsh Government has confirmed that it will phase out the Communities First programme by March 2018.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the Welsh Government's official measure of deprivation for Wales. It is made up of eight separate domains of deprivation: income; employment; health; education; housing; access to services; environment; and community safety. HEFCW widening access policy has been aligned with this geographically-based measure.

Low participation neighbourhoods are a priority for widening access to higher education in Wales, as in England. The low participation neighbourhoods measure takes account of young full-time students in the bottom 40% of areas as defined by POLAR3. In addition, in Wales, HEFCW takes account of mature full-time and all part-time students in the bottom 40% of low participation areas, as defined by the proportion of working age adults with HE level qualifications (as measured using Census 2001 data)

Improving part-time learning opportunities is a priority for the Welsh Government and HEFCW. Higher education providers in Wales are encouraged to promote flexible learning and to maximise participation through different and more flexible ways to experience higher education. Part-time higher education contributes to a range of policy agendas in Wales, including widening access and employability and skills. In HEFCW's Corporate Strategy to 2017 there is a national measure to increase the percentage of part-time students attending higher and further education in Wales.

Student partnership

Partnership between institutions and the student body is a particular focus within Wales. It features within HEFCW's forthcoming Corporate Strategy 2017-2020. Much of the work regarding student experience has been carried out via the [Wise Wales](#) initiative. Student partnership is an integral part of the Wales Quality Assessment Framework.

Supplementary Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) metrics

[Wales has the lowest regional Gross Value Added \(balanced\) per head](#) (increase in the value of the economy due to the production of goods and services) of any country in the UK.

It also has the lowest salary opportunities available for graduates compared with other countries of the UK. LEO metrics need to be contextualised with salary levels and cost of living in the locality that the graduate is employed.

Grade inflation metrics

A number of universities in Wales were originally constituent partners of the University of Wales. The University of Wales was responsible for the standards of its degrees and its regulations set out first degree classification algorithms for all constituent institutions. Over time, the constituent institutions subsequently became universities – and degree awarding bodies - in their own right and took over responsibility for their own standards. As part of this process, degree algorithms were revisited. Thus, depending on the date when the constituent institutions became universities in their own right, data from 10 years ago may in effect relate to a different university with different regulations and approaches to standards, and therefore is not comparable to outcomes at the present university. Where this is the case, Welsh institutions will provide the data for the first year at which outcomes for the present university are available.