

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales

hefcw

Part-time Higher Education

Position Statement



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government

1 Introduction

- 1.1 HEFCW's Part-time Higher Education (HE) Position Statement sets out our vision and confirms our commitment to the Welsh Government's part-time higher education priority expectations¹.
- 1.2 We are well-placed, as a funder of higher education provision in Wales, to inform and shape policy developments relevant and appropriate for delivery by higher education providers. We are committed to working collaboratively to increase and strengthen supply and demand for part-time study in higher education. Our partners, including the higher education (HE) sector, further education (FE) sector, the National Union of Students Wales (NUS), the Open University Students Association and other agencies are better placed to create strategic change at institutional level, to improve supply and affect demand.
- 1.3 Our position on part-time HE in Wales has been developed before the implementation of the Welsh Government's HE part-time undergraduate support package is rolled out in 2014/15 and the impact of the support assessed, and before the Welsh Government's *Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales reports*^{2, 3}. Our position will contribute to and inform these processes.

2 Defining 'part-time' higher education

- 2.1 There is no simple definition of part-time HE study with increasing similarity between part- and full-time study patterns. Part-time supply and demand issues are complex. For funding purposes, previously, we have defined part-time in relative terms to indicate a less than full-time study commitment⁴, but we recognise the limitations of this.
- 2.2 Recently, the terms 'part-time' and 'flexible' have been used synonymously. The term 'flexible' is broad and may apply equally to full-time study, moreover, part-time study might be inflexible. There is merit in retaining the term 'part-time' as employers and the public are familiar with it. We do not want a limiting definition of part-time higher

¹ Welsh Government [Policy Statement on Higher Education](#) (June 2013)

² [Welsh Government Statement on Undergraduate Support](#) 'To encourage part-time learning in Wales, I intend to make funding available to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to continue to subsidise the delivery costs of part-time courses. I will expect HEFCW to continue to fund part-time provision at broadly current levels and in return I would expect higher education institutions to exercise restraint in the setting of part-time tuition fees.' (March 2013)

³ Welsh Government Review, written statements: [November 2013](#) and [February 2014](#)

⁴ Students are classified as registered for part-time study if: (i) they are registered for part-time study, and if: (ii) they are registered at an educational establishment; (iii) they are pursuing studies; and (iv) they do not meet the requirements to be either full-time or full-time sandwich year out. Mainstreamed Continuing Education (CE) students should be classified as part-time'. See annual HEFCW End of Year Monitoring Circulars.

education provision with the unintended consequence of limiting opportunities and choice.

- 2.3 We recognise the diversity of part-time learners' study intentions. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2012 and 2013 Universities UK (UUK) reports define part-time students by study intentions including career enhancers, career changer; non-career learners and career entrants⁵. Our position on part-time higher education recognises the needs of all students, whether they choose to enter a career, enhance career prospects, learn for leisure or pleasure. We will continue to use 'part-time' to indicate that it is a mode of study available at a range of levels, with certain characteristics, including flexibility.

3 Our vision

- 3.1 Our vision is for:

excellent quality, accessible, all-age, part-time higher education learning opportunities at all levels for the benefit of individuals, society and the economy in Wales and more widely.

4 Our rationale

- 4.1 We believe that part-time HE is a key pillar of higher education's portfolio. Part-time higher education has a significant contribution to make to people and the economy in Wales. There is a need for radical action to increase and improve the part-time higher education system, increase learning opportunities and encourage wider participation if we are to engage all students with the potential to benefit from HE, improve the part-time student experience and support economic growth.
- 4.2 We consider part-time higher education is important for reasons including:

5 Part-time higher education is important for the economy

- 5.1 Part-time higher education is important to upskill the workforce, respond to employers' needs and support the Welsh economy. The Welsh Government is clear that part-time HE provision is in our national interest⁶. Part-time HE is a key component of a higher education strategy to meet the supply for, and demand needs of, a fast-paced economic environment.

⁵ [Expanding and Improving Part-time Higher Education](#). BIS, 2012; *The Power of Part-time, Review of Part-time and Mature Higher Education*, UUK, 2013

⁶ Welsh Government. [Policy Statement on Higher Education](#). p.33

- 5.2 The skills base in Wales is primarily amongst those already employed or seeking work. Part-time higher education must provide accessible, vocational, and other upskilling and development opportunities at all levels including workbased learning and higher level apprenticeships. This is assisted by credit based recognition, accumulation and transfer schemes. A challenge for the HE sector in Wales is continuing to ensure an effective, timely response to employer and employee needs.
- 5.3 We support the Welsh Government's assessment that '*Wales needs a blend of full- and **part-time provision at varying levels**, including continuing professional development, and focused on employer requirements*'. Our Corporate Strategy confirms our intention that: the contribution of higher education to workforce development is strengthened; employability is a key outcome of the higher education experience; a greater proportion of the population achieves higher level skills and; that a greater diversity and flexibility in programme design, duration and delivery is developed to match need and demand⁷. We recognise the value of an international mobility experience in developing employability skills⁸.
- 5.4 Part-time HE provision responds to regional and local higher-level vocational and economic needs. Collaborative partnerships with employers, with further education colleges and other providers is an effective means of ensuring regional progression pathways to and through higher education and higher level skills. We recognise the value and potential of new and emerging models of higher and further education partnerships to offer innovative structures to sustain coherent, innovative regional learning opportunities. Higher education and its partners must consider what more should be done to provide a coherent response to regional needs and priorities in the long-term.

6 Part-time higher education is important for individuals

- 6.1 Economic upskilling and reskilling facilitates social mobility, creates financial benefits and career opportunities. Part-time higher education widens access to higher education and higher level skills, enables access to the professions and priority sectors and supports social mobility. Our Corporate Strategy commitment '*to ensure inclusion, progression and success in higher education*' recognises the contribution that HE can make to widening access, social mobility and economic upskilling⁹. Part-time study is attractive to widening access students, for reasons including its tradition of offering 'low cost, low risk', introductory 'taster' and bite-sized learning opportunities^{10, 11}. Part-time HE contributes to Welsh Government tackling poverty agendas

⁷ [HEFCW Corporate Strategy 2013-14 to 2015-16](#), p.18.

⁸ HEFCW Corporate Strategy, p. 17.

⁹ Corporate Strategy p.11.

¹⁰ See BIS report, cited above and [The Power of Part-time: Review of part-time and mature higher education](#), Universities UK, 2013.

¹¹ BIS report, cited above, p.105.

providing study opportunities for parents, carers and those experiencing 'in work' poverty.

- 6.2 Many widening access students choose to live and study in close proximity. Widening access to and through part-time study pathways contributes to higher education's corporate social responsibility. We see flexible, part-time provision as a fundamental component of higher education's social responsibility and evidence of its commitment to social justice and ensuring equality of opportunity.
- 6.3 HE provides equality of opportunity for some individuals with protected characteristics. Part-time HE enables more people to benefit from higher education.

7 Part-time higher education is important for society

- 7.1 Part-time HE has wider benefits, beyond individual career and financial outcomes. Part-time higher education contributes to reviving and sustaining communities and the shaping of a democratic and inclusive society.¹² We expect higher education providers to continuously review and extend their part-time HE provision, including Welsh medium provision, to ensure it maximises opportunities for, and supports the needs of, communities and the culture of Wales.

8 Securing the success of part-time higher education in Wales

- 8.1 To secure improved and sustainable part-time higher education certain conditions are required, including:
- 8.2 A clear understanding of the part-time market, the nature of part-time HE provision and part-time students. Policy makers, universities and their partners should be informed by the same level and quality of part-time-related data and evidence as full-time.
- 8.3 A strategic commitment to, and investment in, part-time higher education provision by policy makers, universities and their partners. There must be parity of esteem between full-time and part-time HE systems at all levels.
- 8.4 An effective operating environment. The Welsh Government acknowledges that the operating context for Welsh higher education is dynamic and changes to funding, technological innovation and increased student expectations, amongst other facts, challenge traditional delivery models. In this context, the Welsh Government has sets out its expectations of the HE sector in relation to flexible and part-

¹² Callender and Wilkinson, 2013, in *The Power of Part-time*, UUK report cited above. 'research indicates that 13% of graduates from part-time higher education became involved in voluntary work, community activities or campaigning.

time delivery¹³. A culture change which places part-time HE at the centre of planning and policy development is required. We will work with universities and their partners to limit constraints on, and develop strategic commitments to, part-time study, so that part-time study is considered as a legitimate and equal alternative to full-time provision.

- 8.5 Innovative and responsive methods of providing and supporting part-time teaching and learning opportunities at all levels and in appropriate locations. The part-time HE offer must be fit for purpose and accessible. Teaching and learning must be genuinely flexible, effectively enhanced by digital and on-line learning and appropriate learning support¹⁴. Higher education providers' strategic planning should demonstrate high-level commitment to part-time HE, equality of opportunity and the promotion of HE. The part-time student experience should be positive, responsive and informed by the part-time student voice. The National Union of Students Wales and other student representative bodies should continue to work with HE providers to secure high levels of part-time learner satisfaction and successful learning outcomes.
- 8.6 A sustainable funding and support system. We agree with the Wales Audit Office assessment that a longer-term solution to funding and support is required to provide greater certainty and stability across the part-time market.¹⁵ Given part-time HE funding and support and trends of declining student numbers, our Corporate Strategy part-time measure is framed in terms comparative to the English context¹⁶. This realistic, if cautious, measure reflects our assessment of the extent of the challenge presented by part-time HE fees and funding to achieving improved part-time HE opportunities within our Corporate Strategy period (2013-16).
- 8.7 An equitable funding regime. To strengthen and sustain part-time HE at all levels, greater equity between part-time and full-time students in terms of financial support and fee policies is required. More equitable funding arrangements should contribute to reversing declining part-time numbers in Wales. A credit-based funding model that did not

¹³ Welsh Government Policy Statement on Higher Education '***The HE sector in Wales can respond by developing more flexible models of provision, both full time and part time, to build a more successful and sustainable future.***' '*Economic success rests on the expansion of a highly skilled and capable workforce. Enhancing the employability of all graduates from Welsh institutions, of any age and background, through various levels and modes of study from full time to part time, undergraduate or postgraduate, is a key priority for Government and universities. Working with businesses to meet their needs will benefit graduates and businesses in Wales and place universities at the heart of economic growth.*' p.8.

¹⁴ Welsh Government commissioned and published report by the [On-line Digital Learning Group](#) (April 2014)

¹⁵ [Wales Audit Office report on higher Education finances](#), paragraph 2.25. p. 40

¹⁶ HEFCW Corporate Strategy 2013-14 to 2015-16, A measure of part-time learning opportunities: '*The percentage change in the number of part-time students attending higher education courses in Welsh higher education institutions and further education institutions to be equal to, or greater than, the comparable figure for the UK.*' p. 13

differentiate between study mode would contribute to incentivising part-time provision and support part-time students.

- 8.8 Improved information. The same quantity and quality of information and advice should be available to full- and part-time applicants from education providers and other organisations to improve the understanding and esteem of part-time HE. Enhanced part-time data collection on a UK-wide basis would contribute to a clearer understanding of part-time markets.
- 8.9 A high market profile. We must increase the profile of part-time HE if we want to improve its market share, demonstrate its potential and attract new students. To encourage, and remove barriers to, entry a part-time funding model should be simple to communicate and clearly understandable. Part-time HE opportunities in Wales should be highly visible, clearly articulated and understood as an integral pillar of higher education provision in Wales.