

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## HEFCW's Part-time Higher Education Position Statement

**Date:** 20 June 2014  
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**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in  
Wales  
**Response by:** No response required  
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This circular provides HEFCW's Part-time Higher Education Position Statement. This Statement sets out our vision and confirms our commitment to the Welsh Government's part-time higher education expectations.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please telephone us on (029) 2068 2225 or email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular provides HEFCW's Part-time Higher Education Position Statement.
2. This Statement sets out our vision and confirms our commitment to the Welsh Government's part-time higher education expectations.

## Background

3. Part-time higher education is a Welsh Government priority, as confirmed in its Policy Statement on Higher Education<sup>1</sup>, its written statement on higher education part-time undergraduate support<sup>2</sup> and more recently in HEFCW's 2014-15 remit letter<sup>3</sup>.
4. The Welsh Government has indicated that its *Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements*<sup>4</sup>, led by Professor Sir Ian Diamond, will include in its review priorities '*strengthening part-time and postgraduate provision in Wales*'<sup>5</sup>.
5. Part-time HE remains a HEFCW Corporate Strategy priority. The Strategy includes a part-time HE measure<sup>6</sup>. Part-time HE, as a mode of study, cross-cuts several of our Corporate Strategy strategic themes primarily widening access, the student experience and skills, and employability and enterprise.

## The Development of HEFCW's Part-time Higher Education Position Statement Development

6. In March 2012, in response to a remit letter request, we submitted to Welsh Government a survey report on employer-focused provision in higher education and progression from further education to higher education. With the Welsh Government's approval, we published our report, the then Minister's response and our underpinning data and information<sup>7</sup>.
7. The report recognised that many issues raised were generic to part-time HE. We sought advice from Welsh Government officials on an early draft of an action plan to underpin the report, as a Welsh Government statement

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government Policy Statement on Higher Education (June 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government [Statement on Part-time Undergraduate Support](#) (March 2013)

<sup>3</sup> [HEFCW remit letter 2014-15](#) paragraph 24

<sup>4</sup> [Welsh Government Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements](#)

<sup>5</sup> See HEFCW remit letter 2014-15 paragraph 16.

<sup>6</sup> [Corporate Strategy](#) *To measure part-time learning opportunities: T4. Part-time '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

<sup>7</sup> See [HEFCW website](#)

on part-time fees and funding was anticipated in mid-2013. We published the early draft action plan for consultation and impact assessment<sup>8</sup>.

8. A summary of responses received is attached as **Annex A**. The consultation responses were broad ranging and encouraged us to set the action plan within a wider strategic framework. Our response to the consultation outcomes is the HEFCW Part-time Higher Education Position Statement.

### **HEFCW's Part-time Higher Education Position Statement**

9. Following consultation and impact assessment we developed the HEFCW Part-time Position Statement, taking advice from our committees which includes representation from higher education institutions as well as the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Colegau Cymru, Welsh Heads of Careers Services, NUS Wales, a part-time student representative, business representatives, and Welsh Government representatives.
10. Our part-time higher education action plan will be reviewed and contribute to our internal monitoring of part-time higher education.
11. HEFCW's Part-time Position Statement is attached as **Annex B**.
12. The Statement recognises that part-time higher education, as a study mode, cross-cuts several of our Corporate Strategy strategic themes primarily widening access, the student experience and skills, and employability and enterprise.
13. The Statement is intentionally high-level. It establishes our vision and strategic aims, why we consider part-time higher education opportunities important for the people, society and the economy of Wales and the conditions required to secure improved and sustainable part-time higher education.
14. We accept that we are publishing the Statement before the Welsh Government's 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 in 2016.
15. We will review the Statement periodically in the light of Welsh Government and UK policy developments impacting on part-time higher education to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
16. The Statement will form part of HEFCW's evidence to the Welsh Government's Review panel referred to above.

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<sup>8</sup> See HEFCW circular [W13/12HE](#)

## Equality and diversity implications

17. We equality impact assessed the part-time higher education action plan around which the Statement has been developed. We recognise that part-time higher education is an attractive option for some students with protected characteristics. In setting out our vision for part-time higher education, our aim is to secure the inclusion and success in higher education of all students at all levels of study, regardless of their background and/or circumstances or reason for study.
18. Our impact assessment processes take account of the policy implications for the Welsh language and sustainability. The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, which we fund, sets out in its strategy plan its commitment to part-time study<sup>9</sup>. The Welsh Government's Future Generations Bill<sup>10</sup>, currently under development, will place duties on HEFCW to contribute to objectives which include Wales being a more equal nation with communities being more cohesive and resilient and the people of Wales participating in a shared culture with a thriving Welsh language. HEFCW will work with the sector to contribute to delivering the objectives.
19. A responsibility rests on higher education institutions to assess the impact of all their policies, including as they relate to part-time higher education, to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.

## Further information

20. For further information, contact Jane Johns (tel 029 2068 2219; email [jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk)).

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<sup>9</sup> [Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Annual Report 2012/13](#)

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government's [Future Generation's Bill](#)

## Summary of HEFCW Part-time (PT) Higher Education (HE) Action Plan consultation responses

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### General points included:

The majority of responses welcomed the Action Plan, the specific actions and acknowledged its potential contribution to increasing PT HE. Responses encouraged us to frame our approach more strategically and raised issues of definition and terminology. Several responses noted that emerging policy and other developments would require our planning and monitoring of PT provision to be responsive and flexible.

### Specific points included:

#### Strategic context

Some responses suggested that the action plan would benefit from being located within a stronger strategic context and direction and that the plan should include a statement on the definition and purpose of PT HE.

#### HEFCW Corporate Strategy and Action Plan PT measures/outcomes

Some responses related to HEFCW's PT Corporate Strategy measure: its clarity, its relation to UK performance and level of ambition and suggested setting action plan measures that demonstrated sector progress at an early stage to enable HEIs to collect appropriate data.

#### Flexible provision:

Some responses suggested a 'flexible provision' action plan, which included PT as one component and noted the increasing importance of the portability of learning. Other responses drew attention to the limited inclusion and incentivisation of, bite sized provision and continuing professional development (CPD) (including non-accredited) and recommended placing greater emphasis on blended learning for all groups, while recognising that learners with additional needs and those not familiar with technology would need increased support.

#### Technology Enhanced Learning

Some responses welcomed the emphasis on e-learning generally, but highlighted the costs of developing online provision, including training and out of hours support. The risks of digital exclusion were noted, including for students in rural Wales/ WA backgrounds. Some responses noted the opportunities for Welsh HEIs to become world-leaders in distance provision and recommended interactive collaborative learning/learning support networks and establishing an HE/FE online digital learning working group. While some responses welcomed the Welsh Government's support for flexible, technology enhanced learning, they recognised that solutions were likely to be market-led. Responses encouraged an enhancement and/or increase in the range of on-line and flexible PT provision available online, despite current technical limitations, and they highlighted accredited MOOCs as part of a blended learning portfolio supported

by HE tutorial support. Responses suggested referencing/promoting the Open Education resource (OER) and the open education portal (OEP).

#### The Student Voice

Some responses highlighted the need to prioritise the PT student voice and noted that not all HEIs were NUS affiliated.

#### Skills/Employer focussed provision

Some responses made explicit reference to the unemployed and the third sector and recommended greater emphasis be placed on work-based learning and Higher Level Apprenticeships. Responses encouraged greater HE and FE collaboration and they suggested an increased focus on FE to HE provision, while cautioning against preventing HEIs from operating their own part-time HE pathways. Other responses highlighted the scope for FE-led delivery to improve coordination of existing provision and suggested the Reaching Wider Programme be one vehicle for promoting PT HE as they emphasised the need to identify mechanisms to support partnership developments.

#### HEFCW PT funding

Some responses noted HEFCW PT funding and recommended we review the affordability and utility of maintaining subsidies. Other responses welcomed PT funding being maintained at broadly current levels and encouraged equal treatment of PT and FT learners in funding and provision. Some responses encouraged a review of future funding options, including ESF options and suggested prioritising certain types of PT study using premium funding to target provision;

#### Part-time fees policy

Some responses welcomed actions to clarify/promote the Wales PT fees and support regime, suggesting HEFCW prioritise and fund it through top-slicing funding. The changes to the 2014/15 PT student support system were broadly welcomed and the importance of PT provision being funded pro-rata to FT was stressed. Some responses expressed concern that the PT fees system would deter PT learners, especially key WA groups and noted that additional costs of study for WA students would require support to increase participation from these groups. Some considered that not funding students with an existing degree-equivalent qualification (ELQ) would militate against supporting the skills agenda. Other responses noted that HEIs were expected by the Welsh Government to exercise restraint in PT fee setting and that HEFCW would implement/monitor PT fee levels. They encouraged the monitoring of the impact of the PT fee on those studying at less than 25% FTE, especially WA groups and individuals with protected characteristics.

#### Information, advice and guidance/careers

Some responses highlighted the additional resources required to provide careers services to part-time learners, given Careers Wales' new remit. They questioned whether the "mutual-aid" scheme (HEIs having reciprocal arrangements for providing advice to students from other HEIs) operated in practice, and they noted the need to ensure 'impartial' information and advice to secure the best guidance for prospective learners.

### The Part-time offer

Some responses recognised that HEFCW could not be involved in determining the content and delivery of provision and suggested that HEFCW provide HEIs with criteria against which to assess their part-time HE offers.

### Welsh medium

Some responses noted that Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol collaboration should be prioritised and encouraged HEFCW to support increased Welsh medium PT provision.

### Postgraduate study (PG)

Some responses encouraged a review of PT PG, including encouraging progression to PT PG studies and access to the professions by WA students. They also considered that trends in PT learners' outcomes should be identified through the PG Taught Experience Survey.

### Best practice/promotion

Some responses welcomed the dissemination of good practice and recommended a national campaign to promote PT HE and funding. Other responses noted the DLHE data limitations for monitoring post-study outcomes.

### Equality issues, including as they relate to widening access students

Some responses encouraged specific reference to PT provision for students with protected characteristics and noted that HEI funding reductions could impact on WA students and/or individuals with protected characteristics. Responses encouraged explicit links to be made between PT HE and WA. Several responses made reference to the potential benefits of a UCAS PT admissions process.