

## **Consultation of HEFCW's draft Corporate Strategy 2017-2020 – Summary of responses**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 HEFCW published its draft Corporate Strategy 2017-2020 for consultation on 22 June 2017. Publication of the consultation was delayed due to the UK Government election. Responses were provided by 12 July 2017. HEFCW received 7 responses in total from the following organisations:
- Aberystwyth University;
  - Bangor University;
  - Cardiff Metropolitan University;
  - Cardiff University;
  - JISC;
  - Open University;
  - University of Wales Trinity Saint David.
- 1.2 This document provides a summary of the responses to the consultation on a question by question basis. These questions requested comments regarding the policy environment, the review of the previous Corporate Strategy, measures to monitor higher education providers, and the detail of the new Corporate Strategy including implications on statutory duties.
- 1.3 The responses to the consultation have been taken into account in the finalisation of the Corporate Strategy recognising the high level and succinct nature of the document means that matters of detail would be more appropriately included in the operational plan. Some suggested actions for HEFCW are not within its remit and have not been included. The revised document has been submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Education for approval on 31 July 2017.

### **2. Q1 – are there additional high level factors in the policy environment which we need to take account of?**

- 2.1 Six of the responses provided comments on this section. Of those six, one response stated that there were no other factors to take account of. Five responses offered a range of factors that needed to be taken account of, which could be categorised under the following headings, Welsh Government policy, UK Government policy, HEFCW priorities, and Future Generations.
- 2.2 Welsh Government policy
- Reference should be made to taking account of the Reid Review of Welsh Government funded research and innovation in Wales;
  - The impact of Welsh Government's schools policy on higher education in Wales should be recognised;
  - Acknowledge changes to both the regulation and delivery of teacher training, as well as the challenges to recruiting students to teacher training, recognising that it has a significant impact on Welsh-medium education;

- Reference to Welsh Government's aspirations for Apprenticeships in Wales.

### 2.3 UK Government policy

- Recognise that UK government policy can have a significant knock on effect for Welsh higher education and provide examples of this, such as degree apprenticeships and the role of the levy, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), cross-border flow, use of Longitudinal Education Outcomes, and levels of funding;
- Set out that the voice of Welsh higher education needs to be heard in the development of UK government policies;
- Reference should be made to the impact of the industrial strategy and regional powerhouses and how Wales can respond;
- There is no reference to dealing with the impact of Brexit;
- Reference the impact of the general election on Wales.

### 2.4 HEFCW priorities

- Clarification would be welcomed on how HEFCW intend on defining geographical classification of areas of deprivation given that Communities First will no longer exist;
- Clarity in relation to the Reaching Wider agenda would be welcomed;
- Recognise the impact of Welsh higher education on local economies;
- Should have explicit recognition of the importance of part-time students, particularly in the context of the need to upskill the adult population.

### 2.5 Future Generations

- Say more about how the strategy meets the 5 'ways of working', 7 'goals' and 46 population indicators. A possible way forward would be to add a brief narrative to the Well-being objectives section.

## 3. **Q2 – do you have any comments on the review of the previous strategy?**

3.1 Five of the responses provided comments in response to this question.

3.2 The following comments were provided:

- The review of the previous strategy demonstrates the breadth of the sector's achievements, and highlights important positive outcomes that have been achieved with support and funding from HEFCW;
- The review could be enhanced through the provision of a more visual and data-driven assessment of impact and effectiveness;
- A more explicit review of the effectiveness of HEFCW's intersecting reporting requirements would also be welcome;
- Institutional autonomy has been central to the success illustrated in the review of performance from 2013-17, and we welcome the commitment to the continuation of this principle as future oversight, funding and regulatory arrangements are considered;
- Inclusion of statistical data for each Welsh institution, evidencing how it contributes to each target, would be helpful;

- Understanding the algorithms / methodologies used by HEFCW to calculate performance against these targets in some instances proved problematic. This restricted institutions ability to benchmark performance across the sector, and made regular in year monitoring more difficult;
- The narrative in respect of the national student survey is too negative and does not reflect that some institutions have consistently performed well, at a UK level, over the period of the previous Corporate Strategy.

**4. Q3 – do you have any comments which will inform the development of measures to monitor the performance and delivery of HE providers?**

4.1 All seven responses provided comments on this question. The first two bullets were raised as comments by multiple institutions.

4.2 The following comments were made:

- Monitoring of institutions should be aligned with HEFCW's current engagement processes;
- The development of measures to monitor the performance and delivery of Welsh providers should take account of the range of performance indicators already in use in the sector, ongoing developments within UK-wide HE performance systems and Welsh Government targets;
- We would caution against the previous approach of directly passing down all Corporate Strategy targets to all universities;
- Consideration should be given to the creation of SMART measures that reflect on the outcome of the elements that make up the vision;
- Measures must be equality impact assessed;
- There should be an explicit measure relating to part-time;
- Close consideration needs to be applied to baseline positions and the process to be applied when institutions do not meet specific targets given that it is not always an achievable expectation to increase performance each year.

**5. Q4 – are there any other high level tasks we have omitted between 2017-20?**

5.1 All seven responses provided comments on this question. One response questioned whether any tasks were required.

5.2 The following further suggestions were made:

- As the independent experts of higher education in Wales HEFCW should be more confident in the document about advising policymakers on issues impacting on higher education Wales such as Brexit, and developments in Welsh schools policy;
- Ensure Welsh interests are represented as developments are taken forward in relation to new policies in England, particularly ensuring that the data needs of Wales are taken forward as HESA's Data Futures Project and the new Graduate Outcomes survey is introduced;
- Monitor the impact of the UK Government's industrial strategy on Wales;
- Lobby Welsh Government to introduce more Apprenticeships;

- Monitor the impact and importance of universities to their local economies;
- Reference to the student voice and HEFCW's role in ensuring that the student voice narrative for Welsh higher education is equal to or better than that promoted for students in England;
- There should be greater emphasis on working in partnership with providers, particularly in relation to ensuring a smooth transition into the post-Hazelkorn arrangements;
- HEFCW should work with all stakeholders to secure the continuing competitiveness of Welsh higher education (in the UK and internationally);
- Greater reference to the role of Welsh higher education internationally and supporting the outward-looking activities of Welsh higher education;
- The new arrangements for external quality assurance should be referenced more explicitly in the proposed activities in order to match success factor 8;
- Strengthen how the strategy meets the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Each of the five elements that contribute to the vision should indicate the goals it meets;
- Commit to minimise the burden of data collection and the complexity of the funding model, post-Diamond;
- Continue to support the growing capability and capacity of the Welsh Higher Education sector's innovative, secure and robust Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure;
- Continue to support the development of quality ICT support services and resources which enable the delivery of world class teaching, learning and research;
- Explicitly reference part-time, specifying that full-time and part-time should have parity following the Diamond Review;
- Take forward discussions around lower intensity modules and further equivalent level qualifications exemptions.

## **6. Q5 – do you have any comments on the HEFCW success factors?**

6.1 Six responses provided comments in answer to this question.

6.2 The following comments were made:

- The success factors are not SMART and it cannot be determined how the success factors would be achieved, there should be SMART targets linked to the factors;
- Success factors 7 and 8 could briefly clarify the basis of 'corrective actions' (i.e. related to the statement of intervention);
- Success factor 3 – reports should evidence appropriate and effective use of funds;
- There may be scope for framing the measures more explicitly in the context of impact rather than output;
- Explicit reference ought to be made in respect of maintaining the reputation and competitiveness of Welsh HE within a UK-wide context;
- Working to ensure a smooth transition to the post-Hazelkorn arrangements is also clearly a desirable success factor;

- Ensuring that the student perspective is properly represented in HEFCW's work and in the work of providers, is an important success factor;
- Delivery of annual funding allocations to HE providers which, in the context of the broader range of financial support for the delivery of higher education, maximises the delivery of policy priorities with the funding available, is a key success factor for HEFCW;
- Support for the growing capability and capacity of the Welsh Higher Education sector's innovative, secure and robust ICT infrastructure, and support for the development and delivery of quality support services in this space, is crucial;
- The success factors don't align with the actions HEFCW have set out in its strategy.

**7. Question 6: Does the strategy have any positive or negative impacts in terms of equality and diversity, Welsh language, or Future Generations?**

7.1 Only four of the responses answered this question.

7.2 The following answers were given:

- The draft document is appropriately aligned with these agendas and it can be expected that this more focused and clearly articulated approach to HEFCW Strategy will have a positive impact;
- Clarity on 'widening access' would be helpful in being able to respond strategically to expectations in this area;
- Could be strengthened by acknowledging specific duties in these areas and referencing supporting documentation that provides further detail on how these duties are met e.g. Strategic Equality Plan, Welsh Language Scheme / Standards Plan etc;
- Greater emphasis on the Welsh Language than the strategy currently demonstrates, given the role of universities in delivering an increase in Welsh Language skills. A commitment to addressing the issue of the sustainability of Welsh medium courses should be explicit;
- The lack of explicit reference to part-time means that it could be argued that the strategy does not take into account the needs of all of those who may want to study at HE level.

**8. Q7 – do you have any other comments?**

8.1 Three responses answered this question.

8.2 The following answers were provided:

- The succinct and high-level approach was welcomed;
- As part-time students and social justice are not brought to the forefront, this could be considered a move to deprioritise;
- We see HEFCW as an invaluable source of advice and guidance and we feel that this needs to come across much more strongly in this section. Sometimes it's not about influencing; we would see HEFCW as a partner

enabling us to progress our strategic priorities through the provision of advice;

- Given the small size of the Welsh sector, HEFCW should (and often does) facilitate the sharing of good practice amongst Welsh providers in respect of the priorities identified in the new strategy this should be explicit;
- It is arguable that a more ambitious and radical approach is required in order that the sector is adequately prepared to address the period of 'certain uncertainty' heralded in this draft Strategy.