

Annual report to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales from the Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee

2018/19



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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Foreword by the Deputy Chair of the Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee

This is the fourth annual report of the Council's Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee (SOAC). It covers the 2018/19 academic year, during which the Committee met twice. I am pleased to present these outcomes on behalf of the Committee's Members and Sir Keith Burnett, who chaired the Committee in 2018/19, but has since stepped down from Council.

The report highlights the broad nature of the work covered by the Committee's remit in areas such as degree apprenticeships, student voice, widening access, mental health and Welsh medium provision. There have been numerous challenges affecting higher education in Wales over the past year but a number of opportunities for positive action as well. The report details how the Committee has worked to provide valuable advice to the Council in respect of policy development in order that it may continue to meet the objectives of its Corporate Strategy.

The membership of SOAC has continued to provide valuable knowledge and constructive input to the work of the Committee and, subsequently, in its advice to the Council. During the year we noted a change of representation for Stephen Griffiths who attended on behalf of Health Education and Improvement Wales and welcomed Stuart Coombs from Cap Gemini.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members, observers and officers of the Committee, for their contributions over the past year. I would like to record my thanks to Sir Keith Burnett, Gwyneth Sweatman (President of the National Union of Students Wales) and Jake Smith (part-time student representative) for their valuable insights into the student experience in Wales. Looking forward to 2019/20 we will welcome Rob Simkins as incoming President of the National Union of Students Wales.

I would like to especially record my thanks and best wishes to Celia Hunt, Director of Strategic Development at HEFCW, who retired in December 2018, for her diligence and professional commitment to the work of the Committee.

I am pleased to commend this annual report to you. Diolch yn fawr.

Rob Humphreys

Chair of SOAC 2019/20; Deputy Chair 2018/19

Introduction

- 1 SOAC's remit includes advising Council on all matters relating to student opportunity and achievement in higher education. This includes aspects of student experience, Welsh Medium, widening access, equality and diversity, skills and employability, and degree apprenticeships with the aim of ensuring that Welsh higher education meets the needs and expectations of learners and other stakeholders.
- 2 The remit, standing orders, and membership of SOAC are provided at **Annex A**, together with the dates of the meetings to be held in 2019/2020.

Review of business

- 3 The Committee's meetings included strategic discussion items which provided scope to review and debate specific themes relevant to the Committee's remit. The strategic discussions included a presentation from James Davies on "Universities and Industry" which informed the Committee's discussion on the skills agenda and degree apprenticeship provision (see para 6). The Committee also received a presentation from Ben Lewis, Director of Student Support and Well-being, Cardiff University, on mental health, safeguarding and student crises, which informed the Committee's discussion on well-being and mental health (see para 15).
- 4 The Committee's considerations were supported by information and discussion papers, including standing items, which covered the breadth of SOAC's remit. Members also received regular updates via redacted minutes of HEFCW's Quality Assessment Committee and those of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee, to ensure that areas of common interest and remit informed SOAC's deliberations.
- 5 The key items discussed by the Committee are covered below and are presented against the Terms of Reference of the Committee (see Annex A).

To advise the Council on all matters relating to student opportunity and achievement in higher education, including Welsh Medium, Initial Teacher Training, widening access, equality and diversity, and skills and employability, with the aim of ensuring that Welsh higher education meets the needs and expectations of learners and other stakeholders.

- 6 **Degree Apprenticeships:** Members considered the updated position on the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships 2018/19, and provided advice on how HEFCW might continue to develop policy in this area. Members provided insights on the funding allocation methodology, likely employer demand and consideration of the factors which should be prioritised in relation to bids should there be an excess of demand for the funding. Members advised that HEFCW should seek expressions of interest from institutions to gauge the likely demand from each of the three priority areas. Members provided useful insights into potential areas for new provision, outside of the three priority areas, should the pilot be extended in the longer term. They also advised on the need for progression routes from lower level apprenticeships to degree apprenticeships. Members also highlighted the importance of support being made available for apprentices in terms of their mental health and well-being, with the expectation that apprentices should have equal access to student support services. HEFCW sought expressions of interest for funding, which demonstrated that there was likely to be sufficient funding available to accommodate the bids received for 2018/19. Members considered the outcome of consultation responses on the funding allocation methodology for Degree Apprenticeships 2019/20 that broadly provide for a demand led approach. The Council considered the outcomes of the consultation at its March 2019 meeting. The advice from Members further informed the Council's approach to funding allocations for 2019/20, which was finalised at its July 2019 meeting.
- 7 **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** The Committee considered the annual equalities report which included a review of HEFCW's 2018/19 strategic equality plan, including the annual delivery plan. The report included an account of equality and diversity policy developments likely to impact on higher education in Wales. Members advised on the development of HEFCW's draft 'Strategic Approach' to Well-being and Health in HE, and an initial draft of an underpinning student-focused mental health action plan, which was further developed through a SOAC task and finish group. Members provided useful advice to inform the 'Approach' including the development of a set of baseline data relating to the mental health of students and their experiences. Members suggested that HEFCW could focus on the experience of students facing health issues which led to an interruption of study and the ease with which students were able to return. The advice of Members informed the further development of the 'Strategic Approach', which was published for consultation in June 2019 and would be further considered at the Council's workshop in November 2019.
- 8 **The implications of Brexit for the student experience in Wales:** The Committee provided its views on the potential implications of Brexit for the student experience in Wales, following a request from the Council. Members advised that the key issues included student and staff mobility, PhD studentships funded via the EU, and the ERASMUS+ scheme. Members suggested that it would be useful to have a pan-Wales approach going forward. The advice from Members was considered at the September meeting of the Council.
- 9 **Student Charters:** The Committee considered proposed changes to HEFCW's student charter guidance in response to the expectation of [Welsh Government](#)

that “further and higher education providers in Wales [should] introduce Student Mental Health Charters” for the 2019/20 academic year. Members agreed that the proposed approach, developed through a HEFCW task and finish group, was appropriate. Officers undertook a soft consultation with organisations including Universities Wales Pro Vice Chancellors’ Learning and Teaching Advisory Group, the HE in FE network, students’ unions and NUS Wales. The final guidance was approved by Council in May 2019 and published in June 2019 as Circular [W19/15HE](#).

- 10 **NUS Wales’ priorities:** The Committee reviewed a summary of the incoming President of NUS Wales and his priorities for 2019/20. It was agreed that there would be a standing item from NUS Wales at each meeting which would aid the Committee’s considerations of matters reflecting the interests of students.
- 11 **Welsh language and Welsh medium provision:** The Committee considered an update on HEFCW’s engagement with the Welsh language and with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (the Coleg). The [2019-20 remit letter](#) included the expectation that HEFCW should “agree Welsh-medium targets in partnership with the Coleg”. In light of this, Members advised that it was essential to manage expectations and set achievable targets. All recognised the importance of maintaining the capacity to deliver Welsh medium provision. The Coleg welcomed HEFCW’s contribution to the agenda in recent years and advised that maintaining a strategic approach was key. In 2018/19 HEFCW and the Coleg continued with its liaison meetings, despite funding being provided directly Welsh Government. This change has shifted our relationship with the Coleg from predominantly monitoring its work to working in partnership. The Committee determined that no new action was required in this area and this was reported to the Council.

To recommend to the Council strategies in support of HEFCW’s Corporate Plan as it relates to the areas covered by this Committee.

- 12 Members considered the remit letters from the Cabinet Secretary for 2018-19 and 2019-20 in relation to the areas of the Committee’s remit.
- 13 The revised 2018-19 remit letter included reference to institutional performance in the 2018 National Student Survey and highlighted poor overall performance in the areas of assessment, feedback and student voice. Members provided advice on HEFCW’s response to Welsh Government and how HEFCW could best meet the Welsh Government’s request, with helpful steers on information which should be included. Members advised that it would be useful for the response to take account of the view of the National Union of Students Wales (NUSW), where appropriate. Members suggested that the response should make specific reference to the experiences of part-time and postgraduate students, including seeking greater transparency from institutions about the use of part-time and postgraduate fees and how this related to widening access activity. The advice of members was taken into account in the draft response which was shared with stakeholders such as NUS Wales, Universities Wales (UW) and the Chair of UW’s Pro Vice-Chancellors’ Learning and Teaching Advisory Group (PVC LTAG). The response was considered by Council at its January 2019 meeting and submitted to Welsh Government.

To act as a sounding board to inform Council regarding new approaches to policy development relating to the areas covered by the Committee.

- 14 SOAC's advice was very helpful in informing Council about new approaches to policy development relating to the Committee's remit including mental health, widening access and public information.
- 15 **Well-being and health in HE including student mental health:** The Committee considered issues relating to well-being and health, following a strategic discussion, led Ben Lewis from Cardiff University (see para 3 and 7). Members considered a range of issues, including the requirement to recognise the needs of the diverse student body and ensure Welsh medium support services were available, as well as appropriate training for staff. Members highlighted the importance of working collaboratively and welcomed the HEFCW funding [Circular](#), considered by Council in March 2019, which invited proposals for student well-being and mental health initiatives on a regional basis and well-being and health strategies by March 2020. The Circular encouraged the adopted of #stepchange and Suicide-Safer University approaches (both Universities UK frameworks). The Circular was developed in consultation with a wide range of partners, via the Committee, including Universities Wales, NUS Wales and Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE) representatives. The Circular also outlined HEFCW's expectation that institutions would commit to the #stepchange and Suicide-Safer Universities approaches in relation to student well-being.
- 16 The outcomes of the Committee's discussions in relation to this area were highlighted to Council via the Committee Chair and taken forward through various channels, including HEFCW's publication of case studies relating to mental health entitled [Higher Education for a Healthy Nation: Student well-being and health](#) in June 2019. The publication was launched at an event in Cardiff, which was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, student union representatives, institutional staff and members of the public.
- 17 **Unistats review:** The Committee considered a paper outlining the replacement of the Unistats website as the source of student information in the UK. Members raised a number of issues including concerns regarding the inclusion of Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data, and the need to determine Wales-specific requirements. Members recognised HEFCW's concerns regarding the LEO data and recommended that these data should not be published for Wales until such time as they had been benchmarked and appropriate contextual data was available. Members provided valuable advice in relation to information which had previously been available as part of the former Key Information Set data, and which could helpfully be included on the new website. Officers took forward the advice of members on behalf of HEFCW in the alpha stage of the Unistats review and this work also helped form the basis of HEFCW's response to the 2019-20 remit letter task relating to student information. The outcomes of the research were later reported to the Committee and were considered to be positive.
- 18 **Widening access:** The Committee considered the draft, refreshed, HEFCW

Strategic Approach to Widening Access and provided advice on HEFCW's new Programme of Action (2018/19 to 2020/21) in response to the 2018-19 remit letter task "to develop a programme of action for higher education, which takes into account the additional funding allocations provided to the Council in 2017-18 and builds upon the various strands of activity taken forward in response to WISERD's 2015 report to the Council on access to higher education in Wales." Members provided helpful steers on developing the Strategic Approach, such as information on HEFCW support for institutions, datasets on participation rates in HE, and a focus on civic mission via widening access to and through adult education. Members' advice on the Programme of Action included how this could take account of the impact of part-time and postgraduate student fees. The Strategic Approach and Programme of Action were finalised, taking on the advice of Members, and considered by Council prior to being submitted to Welsh Government in January 2019. The Committee also considered and advised on the outcomes of the review of the Reaching Wider (RW) Programme, which were broadly positive. An update on the RW programme, and associated strategy development by Partnerships, was considered at the November 2018 Council meeting, at which an extension to 2021/22 of the in principle funding of the Reaching Wider programme was agreed.

Forward Look

- 19 The 2018/19 meetings provided a useful forum for rich and diverse discussions across the breadth of the Committee's remit. SOAC will continue to work jointly with the Council's other strategic committees to facilitate the delivery of HEFCW's Corporate Strategy, and the continued implementation of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015. It was agreed that, going forward, there would be three meetings of the Committee each year and Officers would consider how to ensure Members were fully briefed for these meetings.
- 20 It is likely that there will be further challenges which will impact on Welsh higher education in 2019/20 and, therefore, which are likely to be relevant to the work of the Committee in the coming year. These include:
 - potential changes to student finance arrangements following the UK government's [review of post-18 education and funding](#) ('the Augar Review').
 - ongoing work to establish the new [Tertiary Education and Research Commission](#);
 - Welsh medium targets, including how Welsh medium provision is developed and delivered with the support of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, in future;
 - the impact of policy development by the Office for Students in England on areas within the Committee's remit, e.g. widening access.
 - any changes resulting from the independent review of the [Teaching Excellence and student outcomes Framework](#).

Remit and standing orders

HEFCW Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee

1. Constitution

- 1.1 A Committee of the Council to be known as the Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee (the Committee) established with the following Terms of reference and standing orders by a resolution of the Council dated 12 July 2018.

2. Terms of reference

- 2.1 To advise the Council on all matters relating to student opportunity and achievement in higher education, including Welsh Medium, Initial Teacher Training, widening access, equality and diversity, and skills and employability, with the aim of ensuring that Welsh higher education meets the needs and expectations of learners and other stakeholders.
- 2.2 To act as a sounding board to inform Council regarding new approaches to policy development relating to the areas covered by the Committee.
- 2.3 To recommend to the Council strategies in support of HEFCW's Corporate Plan as it relates to the areas covered by this Committee.
- 2.4 To consider any matters referred to the Committee by the Council.

3. Standing Orders

- 3.1 The standard HEFCW Committee Standing Orders shall apply, including ensuring advice is given in accordance with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

4. Membership and attendance

- 4.1 The Committee shall comprise up to 14 members, including at least one member from the Council. The Committee will be chaired by a Council member.
- 4.2 The quorum for Committee members is 7 members, including the Chair or their nominee.
- 4.3 The Director of Strategic Development shall normally attend the meetings of the Committee.
- 4.4 A member of the Strategic Development directorate shall service the Committee.
- 4.5 There shall normally be two meetings per year.

5. Authority

- 5.1 The Committee is an advisory body with no executive powers.
- 5.2 The Committee shall have the authority to establish Task and Finish Groups to provide advice as it considers necessary, relating to the areas it covers.

Composition of the Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee

Members

Council

- Up to four Members of Council (Chair and deputy Chair)

Appointments Committee appointees

- 2 Institutional appointments
- Sector skills or employers' organisation representative
- WHECS/Head of Student Services
- Up to 2 Employers
- Other: widening access expertise, if not covered by the other members

Nominees

- A nominee from the FE sector
- Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
- Health Education and Improvement Wales
- National Union of Students Wales
- The Open University
- Part-time student/adult mature learner
- Schools representative
- Universities Wales nominee – Chair of Pro Vice Chancellors Learning and Teaching Advisory Group
- Universities Wales nominee – a Vice Chancellor

Observers

- Universities Wales
- Welsh Government

Officers

- Director of Strategic Development
- Head of Student Experience
- Head of Skills and Employability
- Head of Widening Access and Inclusion

Other

- Additional attendees by invitation depending on topics to be discussed (eg medical provision, Initial Teacher Training, Conservatoire studies, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Higher Education Academy, Careers Wales, Universities' Association for Lifelong Learning)

Membership of Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee (2018/19)

Council	Sir Keith Burnett (Chair) Rob Humphreys (Deputy Chair) James Davies Sarah John
Appointments Committee appointees	
Institutional nominee	Professor Martin Stringer
Institutional nominee	Professor Claire Taylor
Sector skills or employers' organisation representative	Professor Ewart Keep
Head of Careers/ Head of Student Services	Jon Howden-Evans
Employer (up to two)	Stuart Coombs, Cap Gemini Vacancy
Widening access	Professor Chris Taylor
Nominees	
Schools	Vacancy
Health Education and Improvement Wales	Stephen Griffiths
Universities Wales nominee	Professor Cara Aitchison
Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol	Ioan Matthews
HE in FE	Ryan Jarvis
National Union of Students Wales	Gwyneth Sweatman
The Open University	Louise Casella
Part-time student/ adult mature learner	Jake Smith
Universities Wales nominee – Chair of Pro Vice Chancellors' Learning and Teaching Advisory Group	Dr Ben Calvert
Observers	
Universities Wales	Kieron Rees
Welsh Government	Ruth Hayton
Officers	
Director of Strategic Development	Celia Hunt (to December 2018)
Director of Policy and Funding	Dr Alyson Thomas (from February 2019)
Head of Student Experience	Dr Cliona O'Neill
Head of Widening Access and Inclusion	Jane Johns
Skills and Employability Manager	Angela West
Senior GO Wales Project Manager	Emma Mock
Student Experience Manager	Savanna Jones
Widening Access and Equalities Manager	Ryan Stokes

Meetings held in 2018/19

13 November 2018

2 May 2019