

Council Meeting

For discussion

Review of 'Covid-19 impact on Welsh Universities: proposed actions'

Agenda: 7
HEFCW/20/48

Disclosable

14/05/2020

1 Issue

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to seek Council advice on any further adjustments which might be made to reduce the burden on HE providers as they respond to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 In order to support Welsh Higher Education, HEFCW is reprioritising its activities, working with Welsh Government and other stakeholders to ensure the financial sustainability of all the Welsh Universities. This will include work to assist universities in accessing funding, where available, to allow them to continue to provide their support and expertise during this period of crisis and to continue to operate for the benefit of their students, staff, the Welsh health service, economy and Welsh society once the outbreak is over. Consequently, we are seeking to reduce significantly the regulatory burden on universities, including through adoption of a light touch Fee and Access Planning process and the postponement of certain other requirements. It is our intention that this will provide universities with the space to deal with the current crisis

3 Recommendation

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. Note the adjustments to regulatory burden already agreed by Council and advise on any further action which might be taken.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 It is important that any further adjustments to regulatory burden are implemented as soon as possible to maximise the support for the sector in addressing the implications of the Covid-19 crisis.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

Contact David Blaney (029 2085 9660; david.blaney@hefcw.ac.uk)

7 Regulatory Burden

- 7.1 Council agreed by correspondence on 2 April a number of proposed changes to regulatory processes in order to minimise the regulatory burden on institutions as they seek to address the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Those agreed changes were communicated to the sector immediately after approval and have subsequently been captured in circular [W20/11HE](#), *COVID-19 impact on higher education providers: funding, regulation and reporting implications*, attached at **Annex A**.
- 7.2 We have been clear with the sector that these revised requirements will remain in place until further notice and that we may amend our requirements as the situation changes and as our understanding of the position of individual universities and the sector as a whole develops. We have also been clear to universities that, whilst HEFCW is adopting a lighter touch approach to most regulatory processes for the time being, this is a time where operating responsiveness and effective governance is critical. Reducing the reporting required by HEFCW is intended to also provide more time for governing bodies to prioritise their time on the key risks facing their institutions. Our regulatory reporting requirements are being revised with the expectation that universities will continue to maintain effective governance and management processes and that significant failures or issues continue to be reported to HEFCW in line with our 'no surprises' policy
- 7.3 We intend to continue to engage with universities and their staff but will do that in a less structured way such that we can continue to be informed but in a way that minimises the distraction of university staff from their operational priorities at this time. In particular, we are engaging extensively with institutional finance teams, and the collective group of Welsh Finance Directors, as well as with VCs, better to understand the pressures being faced by the sector as a whole and by individual institutions.
- 7.4 A number of those changes required the agreement of the Welsh Government. That agreement has been sought but, at the time of writing, no response has been received. We have been clear in our communication with the sector that this approval remains a requirement before we can implement all of the proposed adjustments and are continuing to liaise with the Welsh Government in this regard.
- Council members are invited to note the adjustments to regulatory burden already agreed by Council and advise on any further action which might be taken.***

8 Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from this paper.

9 Communications implications

- 9.1 We have already communicated the previously agreed adjustments to the sector and publicly. Any adjustments following this Council discussion will be communicated via an update to the circular.

10 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 10.1 We will carry out impact assessments to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We will also consider the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales, and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments. We will update any guidance as required in the light of mitigatable negative impact on the above. We have been clear that providers are expected to continue to take account of their own duties in these areas, and should alert HEFCW to any concerns about the negative impact of the crisis on protected characteristic groups and the Welsh language.

11 Risk Assessment

Risk	Action to address risk
Institutions might be unable to address immediate considerations arising from the Covid-19 pandemic because of addressing burdens imposed by the Council.	The new arrangements referred to in this paper will create space for institutions to focus on immediate priorities.
Institutions might fail to meet expectations of good governance and management, or delivery of policy priorities, in the light of reduced regulatory engagement.	We have been clear with the sector that we will continue to engage in the full range of normal policy and regulatory elements: the changes agreed merely allow for adjustments in the form of engagement. We have been clear with the sector that expectations of high governance standards remain.