

International Engagement: HEFCW's position statement and role

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of setting out our international position statement and role is to define and prioritise our own responsibilities in this area, whilst maximising our support for the international ambitions of the higher education (HE) sector and the Welsh Government.
- 1.2 This document presents our statement and role in the immediate term, i.e. that defined by the current Corporate Strategy period to the end of 2015/16.

2 Our International Position

- 2.1 Our interest in the international dimension of HE extends across our Key Strategic Themes: Research, Innovation and Engagement (RIE); Student Engagement; Skills, Employability and Enterprise; Widening Access, and in Governance.
- 2.2 We support the international dimension of Wales' HE system and promote the positive international reputation of our sector. We recognise the increasing importance universities place on the contribution that internationalisation makes to their reputations. We see the recruitment of international students and engagement with carefully selected international networks and partners, contributing to a high quality experience for all students and to research excellence. These activities help to underpin a strong and sustainable HE sector in Wales.
- 2.3 As well as opportunities, there are of course risks associated with international activity, and these are both financial and reputational. Universities are responsible for conducting due diligence in their international collaborations and for the academic standards of their awards, whether delivered inside or outside the UK. We assess risk to universities through HEFCW's annual institutional risk review (IRR) process, and universities are required to notify us of significant changes to their risk profile. We have a statutory responsibility to secure quality assessment of provision, similar to HE funding bodies in other parts of the UK. Quality assurance is currently provided by the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#).
- 2.4 We work with a range of organisations to help facilitate the sector's capture of international opportunities. These include the Welsh Government, the UK, Scottish and Northern Ireland Governments, the UK higher education funding bodies, Universities Wales (UnisWales) and individual universities in Wales, the UK HE International Unit (IU), Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Higher Education Academy (HEA), UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA), UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB), Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), National Union of Students (NUS), ColegauCymru, and the British Council (BC, in Wales and globally).

3 Our International Role

- 3.1 This section describes our international role first in terms of activity that spans

HEFCW's key strategic themes. It then sets out our role specifically in relation to RIE; Student Experience; Skills, Employability and Enterprise; and Widening Access. It then describes how HEFCW's corporate processes support internationalisation and enhance international reputation.

Activity that spans HEFCW's strategic themes

3.2 Across HEFCW's key strategic themes we currently:

- Act as a responsive expert on European and International matters in support of HE in Wales.
- Provide advice to Welsh Government/ Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) to maximise the sector's grant capture from and promote the effective delivery of EU investments in Wales.
- *Mechanisms:*
 - i. *WEFO ESIF Programme Monitoring Committee (HEFCW is a member)*
 - ii. *ESF High Level Skills Sector Group (HEFCW is a member)*
 - iii. *Welsh European Liaison Officers (WHEELOs) group (HEFCW attends)*
- Respond to formal inquiries on European and international aspects of HE, including those relating to EU funding by the National Assembly for Wales, Welsh Government requests from parliamentary questions, and to consultations from the QAA (such as on strengthening the quality assurance of transnational provision). We also work with organisations such as the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (DBIS), IU and WHEB, to provide responses to relevant consultations from the European Commission (EC).
- Enable the capture of international opportunities for our sector. This role includes, with the sector, steering the remits and priorities of specified sector organisations/ agencies, such as the IU, and administering and advising on funding models.
- In relation to the IU, opportunities for the sector include:
 - a. Exchanges and scholarship programmes such as [Science without Borders UK](#), the [UK-Indonesia DIKTI Scholarship Scheme](#) and the [UK Outward Mobility Programme](#) and UK Government funding initiatives such as the [Emerging Powers \(Newton\) Fund](#).
 - b. Developing relationships with key international HE sectors and governments. Current initiatives supported by the IU include [UK-India Education Research Initiative \(UKIERI\)](#) and the [UK-China Partners in Education \(UKCPIE\)](#) programme which are co-funded by the Welsh Government.
 - c. Influencing EU decision-makers and maximising competitive advantage in Europe, such as in relation to the decision to cut the Horizon 2020 (H2020) programme budget (by more than €2.7bn) to boost a €315bn European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI).
- *Mechanism: International Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB), IU (HEFCW is a member)*

- Promote the positive reputation of the Wales HE sector internationally, and where we can, add value to UnisWales led initiatives such as:
 - a. Promoting Wales as a study destination ([‘Study in Wales Brand’](#)).
 - b. Supporting the development of a proposed ‘Global Wales’ initiative (similar to the [Connected Scotland](#) campaign) for universities in Wales to connect with partner countries and priority markets by working with government, the British Council and other organisations.
- Provide information on international opportunities as they arise, such as from a US Embassy sponsored HE professionals visit to the USA; see our [report](#). This visit also enabled public and private sector support for a high profile reception by UnisWales at NAFSA (Association of International Educators) conference in Boston in 2015: [New Horizons in International Education](#).
- *Mechanism: Attend Global Wales and International Director/ International PVC meetings as required*
- Provide a coordinating role for/ input to international delegations and visits (inward and outward; public and private sector), ensuring the involvement of appropriate expertise. This is specifically when we can add value to the interests of the delegation, or to our sector or government, such as in topics relating to HE policy (e.g. system-to-system approaches, regulation, funding, and quality assurance) or trade and investment.

Research Innovation and Engagement

- 3.3 Our document [Research, Innovation and Engagement: HEFCW’s Role and Action Plan](#) presents our role in relation to these areas. This includes a responsibility to support the sector in its EU grant capture, particularly under H2020 and ESIF.
- 3.4 In terms of our international role under the RIE strategic theme, in addition to the activities described in Section 3.2 of this document (above), we currently:
- Support WHEB in maximising the sector’s EU grant capture for R&I and its influence in Brussels. WHEB has secured sector funding to 2018; under its new strategic plan it will:
 - a. Increase the sector’s engagement with EU institutions /networks, its EU grant capture in priority areas for Wales and maximise synergies with European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs).
 - b. Engage in and influence the debate on post-2020 EU funding programmes.
 - c. Prioritise engagement with EU decision makers and networks where funding opportunities for specific areas can be accessed through the Erasmus+ These include: University business collaboration, curriculum development and student and staff mobility.
 - *Mechanism: WHEB Board (HEFCW is a governance member)*

- Provide advice in UK Government initiatives, such as the UK (BIS) European Research Area (ERA) Steering Group, which provides a UK (Member State) position in the development of a ERA. This seeks to reinforce excellence across the whole of Europe by creating more effective national research systems, optimising transnational co-operation and increasing Europe’s global competitiveness.
- *Mechanism: UK (BIS) ERA Steering Group (HEFCW is a member)*
- Broker and promote opportunities for universities to engage with international businesses, and the positive role of the sector in enabling inward investment.
- *Mechanisms:*
 - i. *Presence at high level events: e.g. HEFCW attended invitation only UK Investment Summit (November 2014)*
 - ii. *Brokering HE support for Welsh Governments’ Inward investment team*

Student Experience

3.5 Our [Strategic Approach to Student Engagement](#) outlines our commitment to supporting the sector and its students in this area as follows:

- We recognise that there is no single student experience and that the student body is extremely diverse. However, we believe that some elements should be core to the experience of all students, including excellent learning and teaching. Other elements are only experienced by individuals or groups of students, including international¹ students studying for courses provided by or validated by universities in Wales, such as those which are delivered abroad. On a general point for the UK as a whole, the QAA has noted lower levels of satisfaction for international compared to other students in a number of areas (including integration on campus, work opportunities, career advice, cost and financial support)².
- The great diversity of the student population requires our universities to manage an increasingly varied range of expectations and needs. We recognise the importance of student engagement activities that ensure student feedback is taken into account, such as through the [WISE Wales partnership](#)³.
- Students’ different areas of expertise can be valuable to partnership, although it can be challenging to engage with the breadth of our student body. WISE promotes partnership through the activities of the university, for example, widening access, volunteering, community engagement, and employability – and potentially in those areas that are distinctive to international students’ experiences including those arising from immigration requirements.
- We expect all universities and all FEIs with directly funded HE provision to have a [Student Charter](#) in place. This is a high level document applicable to

¹ Those domiciled outside the UK and EU

² In its guidance for UK HE providers on [International Students Studying in the UK](#) (New guidance is in train)

³ This includes UnisWales, HEFCW, the National Union of Students Wales (NUSW), the QAA, HEA and ColegauCymru

the diverse body of students which provides signposts to more detailed information, such as regulations, student support, and course information.

- Wales is part of the UK's world class HE system, and offers a distinctive set of experiences, including a safe environment relatively close to large transport hubs and a diverse range of universities, history and culture. High quality provision is core to our universities remaining competitive in a global market place.
- HEFCW has a statutory responsibility to secure quality assessment of provision, similar to HE funding bodies in other parts of the UK. Quality assurance is currently provided by the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#), a single agency delivering a UK-wide service. The QAA has been working with the sector to strengthen the quality assurance of transnational education (TNE). Current quality arrangements will cease in 2015/16, with potentially new arrangements being introduced from 2017/18. HEFCE has established a [Quality Assessment Review Steering Group](#) to review the quality assurance of UK higher education provision.
- The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) has been [aligned with the European Qualifications Framework \(EQF\)](#). This helps people and organisations to translate achievements between countries and work across the European Union (EU). We will be informed on matters relating to the EQF through our partnership in the CQFW stakeholder group which takes effect from April 2015.
- As a part of our Corporate Strategy commitment we:
 - a. Measure the internationalisation of higher education in Wales (CST7. Overseas Students): *The percentage change year on year in the number of overseas students attending higher education courses in Welsh higher education institutions will be equal to, or greater than, the comparable figure for UK higher education institutions (excluding London and the South East).*
 - b. Collect institutional forecasts for international students (as part of our Governance role).
 - c. Have committed to monitor the proportion of international staff and numbers of TNE partnerships/campuses.
- We are piloting the collection of in-year (early) statistics for new enrolments of international students, in conjunction with UnisWales.
- We also collect Outward Student Mobility (OSM) data via HESES. HESA has recently enhanced the OSM record to include duration and type of mobility, we are therefore reviewing the need to collect OSM data under HESES.
- *Mechanisms:*
 - i. *Measure Corporate Strategy overseas students (OS) target and monitor TNE partnerships*
 - ii. *Collect in-year international student and enhanced TNE data*
 - iii. *Respond to relevant UK wide consultations and research projects (e.g. we responded to the initial consultation on strengthening TNE quality*

assurance (2013) and contributed to the BIS research project: 'The value of TNE')

- iv. *Represent the UK Funding HE Funding Bodies on the UCAS International Advisory Group which has recently undertaken an [International Admissions Review](#)*
- v. *Contribute to relevant UK events and conferences (e.g. invited panellist at the 'International Student Experience session' UKIERI Regional Conference, Bristol, December 2014: [Report here](#)).*

Skills, Employability and Enterprise

- 3.6 Our vision is to produce graduates that are able to demonstrate and communicate their value to prospective employers – in Wales and further afield.
- Our commitment to improving the job-related skills of all our graduates is outlined in the [Agreement on Skills and Employability for Wales](#)⁴.
 - a. This identifies three priority areas where future effort should be focussed: work placements, employer approved courses and embedding skills across the curricula.
 - b. We requested that all Welsh universities detail activities in these three priority areas in a Skills and Employability Action Plan (SEAP) and we have funded new innovative activities in support of these plans which include OSM placements, internships, and volunteering.
 - c. Our future focus is to identify and promote good practice and to learn from institutional activity in this area.
 - Increasing OSM is a government and sector priority across the UK. We promote the [International Unit's Outward Mobility Programme](#) which has published findings on outcomes for mobile students as evidenced in the 2013 Destination of Leavers from HE data⁵: [Gone International: Mobile students and their outcomes. Report of the 2012/13 graduating cohort.](#)
 - Initiatives supporting student and graduate placement include [the Wales' university consortium approach led by ECTARC](#) funded through Erasmus+. This builds on the European placement activity formally delivered under [GOWales](#). GOWales is also exploring further opportunities to promote international student mobility under the 2014-2020 EU funding period.
 - We provide advice to the UK National Agency for the new Erasmus+ programme at UK and Wales level, and advise and support universities as appropriate.

⁴ HEFCW, UnisWales, CBI Wales and NUS Wales have jointly developed a framework for skills and employability

⁵ The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey collects information on what leavers from higher education (HE) programmes are doing six months after qualifying from their HE course (employed, engaged in further study and so on). Individual HEIs administer their own surveys, using materials provided by the [Higher Education Statistics Agency](#) (HESA). The results are published on the [Unistats web-site](#).

- Modern foreign language learning (MFL) promotes OSM, graduate skills and employability and international trade with Wales. [Routes into Languages Cymru](#) in partnership with CILT Cymru (the national centre for languages) aims to raise the profile of language learning. Other initiatives include Cardiff University's [Languages for All](#) which is a free service for all its students. Swansea University also offers [Languages for All](#) in the medium of Welsh. Approaches to MFL in Wales may be considered further with the reporting of [Donaldson review](#) of the curriculum and assessment.
- *Mechanisms:*
 - i. *Erasmus+ Country Advisory Group for the UK National Agency for Erasmus+ (HEFCW is a member)*
 - ii. *UK HE International Mobility Programme – Community of Practice (HEFCW is a member)*
 - iii. *Routes into Languages Cymru Steering Group (HEFCW is a member)*
 - iv. *SEAPs - The good practice and lessons learnt will be a feature of an event in spring 2015 to promote universities skills and employability activities, including international examples. This event will inform the delivery of our future skills and employability remit.*

Widening Access

3.7 Our [Strategic Approach to Widening Access](#) outlines our commitment to supporting the sector in this area as follows:

- Widening access (WA), inclusion, progression and success in higher education is a strategic part of our strategy for HE. We work with partners to support and promote opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds who have the potential to benefit from higher education.

3.8 We currently:

- Provide guidance to universities with respect to institutional Fee Plans. Universities that wish to charge above the basic fee rate are required to submit a fee plan detailing the additional investment they will make in support of the promotion of higher education. This currently may include:
 - a. Internationalisation activity, such as international student and graduate study and work placements and international student recruitment (above).
 - b. Internationalisation to encourage social mobility, including participation in the EU's Erasmus+ programme, and internationalisation of the curriculum have been specifically promoted in recent Fee Plan guidance.
- Promote flexibility and good practice in study abroad activity/ exchange, including via the Higher Education Academy's (HEA's) [Internationalisation Framework](#) in which equality and inclusion are core principles.
- *Mechanisms:*
 - i. *Fee Plan Guidance and feedback until 2016/17*
 - ii. *Future Directions for HE in Wales (HEFCW is represented on related working groups)*

iii. *Provide advice to organisations on HE internationalisation policy*

3.9 Our draft [Widening Access Programme of Action](#) for the period 2015/16 to 2016/17 will set out our response to a challenge from the Minister for Education and Skills for universities to do more to widen access to HE, such as by targeting WA learners in the promotion of international exchanges.

4 Corporate Processes

4.1 Our Corporate Processes support the delivery of our priorities to support internationalisation and enhance international reputation.

4.2 We currently:

- Measure and monitor HEFCW's corporate targets and commitments including those specifically relevant to international engagement (3.5 above).
 - Provide guidance to universities with respect to institutional Fee Plans (3.8 above).
 - Evaluate internationalisation particularly in the context of the Welsh Government's priority of enhancing the sector's international reputation, through HEFCW's Strategic Plan Engagement Document processes (SPED) which provides an evidence base of institutional approaches to internationalisation.
 - Assess risk to universities and how this is managed through HEFCW's annual institutional risk review (IRR) process.
 - Liaise with major bodies in the HE sector regarding advice to international students in Wales caught up in UKVI highly trusted sponsors' issues (Governance role). Our Financial Memorandum with institutions requires that institutions notify us of significant changes to the risk profile and issues as they arise. The memorandum also requires the institution to immediately notify us of any serious weakness. A change in immigration status, for example, would be caught by these requirements.
- *Mechanisms:*
- i. *Attend the UKVI Sponsorship Working Group/ related fora and advise and support universities as appropriate.*