

# Widening access to higher education

Part-time employer-focussed  
provision in higher education  
and progression from further  
education to higher education

March 2012



Noddir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Sponsored by  
**Welsh Government**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This advice has been formulated in response to the request in HEFCW's 2011-12 remit letter relating to part-time provision in higher education (paragraph 16):

*'I expect the Council to utilise research and evidence to inform future action and to build on the revised arrangements for widening access with particular emphasis on part-time, employer focussed provision and opportunities for progression from further education. I look to the Council to report to me by March 2012 on progress made in this regard and any initial findings.'*

- 1.2. The above request frames part-time employer-focused provision in the context of our widening access arrangements. This is consistent with our Corporate Strategy strategic intentions and action plan to implement *For our Future* expectations which recognises that ensuring '*participation is maximised through different and more flexible ways to experience higher education, including through part-time study*' is a widening access priority<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, our Corporate Strategy skills priority acknowledges the role of part-time provision in ensuring that learners are equipped for the world of work and for their role as citizens, and that higher education contributes to workforce development.
- 1.3. Having sought clarification from Welsh Government officials, this report largely focuses on issues of part-time employer-focussed provision and progression from further education (FE). However, in doing so, we recognise that these groups are only segments of a diverse part-time higher education (HE) market. Our broader commitments to improving part-time learning opportunities not only to support a buoyant economy, but they contribute to the Welsh Government priorities of widening access, social mobility, citizenship, and '*reviving and sustaining of communities and the shaping of a democratic, civilised and inclusive society*', thereby meeting *For our Future* expectations<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the report's initial findings and conclusions include references to all part-time markets, which require many of the same considerations as employer-focussed provision.
- 1.4. Our work to inform this report has involved consideration of what might specifically constitute higher level 'employer focussed provision', recognising that employer requirements can vary considerably. Therefore, we have focussed on Foundation Degrees as a key vehicle for articulating employer-focussed provision. We have done so, whilst acknowledging that other qualifications, including HNC/Ds, bite-size, undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, are also attractive to employees and employers alike.
- 1.5. From an initial assessment of the postgraduate part-time market, we concluded that there were less immediate issues with part-time, postgraduate study. Therefore, this report is concerned with undergraduate level provision. We are, however, aware of the wider debate on postgraduate matters which is ongoing at UK level. In 2010, the Postgraduate Review established by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) and led by Sir Adrian Smith<sup>3</sup> examined a range of issues, including access to postgraduate study and the potential barriers affecting the diversity of participation. More recently, there has been considerable discussion about the

<sup>1</sup> [For our Future: the twenty first century higher education strategy and plan for Wales](#) (November 2009), Welsh Government, p3.

<sup>2</sup> [For our Future: the twenty first century higher education strategy and plan for Wales](#) (November 2009), Welsh Government, p3.

<sup>3</sup> [One Step Beyond: Making the Most of Postgraduate Education](#), DBIS, March 2010

implications which higher undergraduate fees may have for postgraduate recruitment, and whether funding arrangements for postgraduates should be reviewed.

- 1.6. The advice is being submitted to the Welsh Government while we continue to work with officials to develop the new fees and funding arrangements for part-time higher education students and before we prepare our action plan for part-time provision. We will consider both as we develop this work further.
- 1.7. We acknowledge at the outset that part-time provision, including employer-focussed provision, is impacted on by a wide range of factors outside the influence of HEFCW and the HE sector, including demographic changes, regional labour market demands and differences, and the current economic downturn. Part-time provision is also influenced by other aspects of Welsh Government and HEFCW HE policies, as will become apparent below.
- 1.8. Our policies and actions, initial findings, recommendations and future actions relating to part-time employer focussed provision and progression to higher education are set out below. We aim to provide a full and coherent account, but there is inevitably some overlap between sections.

## 2. Definition of part-time students

- 2.1. Students are classified as part-time by HEFCW if they:
  - are registered at an educational establishment;
  - are pursuing studies;
  - do not meet the requirements to be either full-time or full-time sandwich year out.

Mainstreamed continuing education students are also classified as part-time<sup>4</sup>.

## 3. Policies, actions and progress made in supporting part-time study and progression

- 3.1. Policy implementation and progress on actions in relation to part-time study in HE, which now inform our advice, are underpinned by detailed analysis of datasets, other UK and national evidence, and sector and student consultation wherever possible. Specifically our work has included:
- 3.2. Establishing a **HEFCW Corporate Strategy measure** to set a target and assess the extent to which 'improved part-time learning opportunities are offered' as expected by *For our Future*<sup>5</sup>;
- 3.3. Publishing our **strategic approach to widening access**, which commits us to working with the sector 'to encourage flexible learning opportunities, including part-time routes to and through higher education'<sup>6</sup>;
- 3.4. Reviewing and consulting on **funding mechanisms** for part-time provision, as part of our revised arrangements in response to *For our Future*, thereby making greater strategic use of funding and supporting key priorities;
- 3.5. Establishing a **Part-time Student Premium** on the unit of funding (£1.77 million in 2011/12). The Premium rewards performance, and promotes further strategic

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<sup>4</sup> See HEFCW circular [W11/43HE Annex E. Higher Education Students Early Statistics 2011/12](#).

<sup>5</sup> HEFCW Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13, p.16, part-time measure: 'the total number of part-time students studying higher education courses in higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales will rise from 54,714 in 2008/09 to 59,000 in 2012/13.'

<sup>6</sup> [HEFCW circular W11/09HE Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to HE](#).

developments and progress towards our Corporate Strategy measure at a time when public rhetoric around HE-level study, fees and funding is largely predicated around full-time paradigms<sup>7</sup>;

- 3.6. Embedding current 'Graham' support for part-time student provision into Widening Access and Innovation and Engagement Strategies, allocating £5.9 million in 2011/12. **Restructuring resources** in this way encourages further strategic alignment between part-time funding and key higher education institution (HEI) planning mechanisms. For widening access this will contribute to ensuring that 'participation is maximised through different ways to experience higher education, including through part-time study' and for skills it will 'strengthen the contribution of higher education to workforce development' in response to *For our Future expectations*;
- 3.7. Reviewing and continuing support for **HEFCW's Part-time Fee Waiver Scheme** (£518,220 in 2011/12), while new fee and support arrangements are being developed, thereby supporting institutions to attract and retain part-time students who are unemployed and actively seeking work, or in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions benefits. Part-time Fee Waiver allocations 2008/09 to 2010/11 are available on our website. The Fee Waiver Scheme is, therefore, a mechanism to increase social inclusion and assist more learners to obtain vocational qualifications;
- 3.8. Confirming our position on **recognising and accrediting prior experiential learning** in response to *For our Future expectations* that 'there will be greater use of accreditation of prior learning' and that 'a greater proportion of the population achieves higher level skills'. Our publication highlights both effective practice and the Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium review of prior experiential learning, including the potential learner benefits of enabling more flexible study patterns, avoiding repetition and resulting in shorter qualification times<sup>8</sup>;
- 3.9. Publishing HEFCW's ten-year strategy: **Enhancing learning and teaching through technology: A Strategy for Higher Education in Wales**, with funding of £1m<sup>9</sup>. The Strategy recognises the role of technology in enhancing learning, teaching, the student experience, as well as its potential transformative impact on all provision, including part-time opportunities by contributing to: flexibility and accessibility; student transition and progression; and underpinning equality and diversity, Welsh medium provision and fostering lifelong learning commitments. Institutional **Learning and Teaching Strategy allocations**, 2011/12, included an additional £200k for enhancing learning and teaching through technology.
- 3.10. Publishing our new **Foundation Degree policy** in 2010 prior to announcing *One Wales* funding to support new, part-time Foundation Degree provision<sup>10</sup>;
- 3.11. Establishing the **HEFCW Foundation Degree Programme** which sits alongside programmes supported under the *Higher Skills Wales*<sup>11</sup> ESF programme funded via WEFO. Our Foundation Degree Programme now funds 23 new part-time, employer focused foundation degree programmes at a total of £7.64 million<sup>12</sup>. *Higher Skills Wales* includes a £16.5 million Foundation Degree Programme for the HE and FE sectors across Wales. This Programme provides foundation study opportunities for

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<sup>7</sup> [Research into Part-time Higher Education Supply and Demand](#) Welsh Government, 2010.p.14 recommended a part-time premium.

<sup>8</sup> [HEFCW circular W10/42HE Accreditation of prior experiential learning](#)

<sup>9</sup> [HEFCW circular W08/12HE Enhancing learning and teaching through technology: A strategy for HE in Wales](#), updated in 2011 to recognise policy and technology changes: [HEFCW circular W11/32HE](#).

<sup>10</sup> [HEFCW circular W10/29HE Foundation degree policy](#)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.higherskillswales.co.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> See [HEFCW circular W10/29HE](#). Funding criteria included fit with regional strategies; the extent to which proposals: evidenced employer need and market demand for the proposed activities; proposed provision would contribute towards upskilling the workforce through part-time provision; and the strength of the proposed partnerships described between HEIs, FEIs, Sector Skills Councils and employer representatives.

those employed in the private sector living and/or working in the Convergence area. *Higher Skills Wales* also incorporates a £34 million Work Based Learning Programme, to upskill workforces via flexibly delivered, bite-sized, university-accredited courses. Courses funded through the HEFCW and ESF programmes are available on our website;

- 3.12. Establishing and funding the University of Glamorgan and University of Wales Newport to deliver the **Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute** (UHOVI) programme of work based learning and flexible part-time provision<sup>13</sup>;
- 3.13. Establishing and funding jointly with HEFCE the **National HE STEM Programme**: HEFCW's contribution to date totals £1m<sup>14</sup>. At Welsh HEIs the programme is primarily centred on chemistry, engineering, mathematics and physics: subjects of broader importance in Wales. Five of the six workforce upskilling projects in Wales offer part-time learning to people in, or hoping to enter, the workforce. Further details about these projects are available on our website;

#### Further actions to inform this review

- 3.14. More recently, to further inform our policy implementation and contribute to this advice, our actions have included:
- 3.15. Reviewing a range of **UK and Wales-specific data** to benchmark and monitor the supply of, and demand for, part-time and flexible provision. This data is available on our website<sup>15</sup>;
- 3.16. Commissioning a **short extension report** building on the Welsh Government's *Research into part-time higher education supply and demand*<sup>16</sup> to investigate further employer demand for, and perceptions of, higher level training<sup>17</sup>;
- 3.17. Developing jointly with the Welsh Government Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFW) and Colegau Cymru a **project mapping progression routes from further education institutions to higher education institutions** within the three HE regional areas (north and mid, south east and south west Wales) to identify existing progression opportunities, gaps, barriers and hindrances to progression on a regional basis, including recommendations for further action. The CQFW project will be completed in April 2012. The final reports from the project will inform further regional developments;
- 3.18. Working with officials of the Welsh Government officials on its **review of higher education in further education**. The review will take account of the benefits of HE in FE for both learners and employers in Wales, examine the scale, quality and cost of HE in FE and it will investigate how delivery can be improved to add value, including delivery models;
- 3.19. Gathering evidence and consulting with key stakeholders to inform a **Skills and Employability Framework**, comprising a collaborative Agreement underpinned by a detailed Action Plan. The *Agreement* (to be published in March 2012) will be jointly endorsed by HEFCW, Higher Education Wales (HEW), CBI Wales and NUS Wales, and will commit us to work in partnership to improve the job-related skills of all our graduates and offer new opportunities to re-skill and up-skill the current workforce (not

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<sup>13</sup> Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute: [Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Wales | National Higher Education STEM Programme](#)

<sup>15</sup> This data is available at [www.hefcw.ac.uk/policyareas/wideningaccess/parttimeprovision](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policyareas/wideningaccess/parttimeprovision)

<sup>16</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/social/latestresearch/researchparttimehe/?lang=en>

<sup>17</sup> *Employer Engagement with Part-time Higher Education*, Oldbell3 report (March 2012) is available at: [www.hefcw.ac.uk/policyareas/wideningaccess/parttimeprovision](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policyareas/wideningaccess/parttimeprovision)

least through revitalising part-time study options). The *Action Plan* (to be published in July 2012), drawing together activities already being carried out by a range of partners, will develop these further to ensure universities and employers across Wales collaboratively share and build on good practice<sup>18</sup>.

- 3.20. Commissioning the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to undertake a **developmental review of all foundation degree provision** in Wales. This review will begin in 2012/13 and will provide information about how qualifications are being developed against the QAA Foundation Degree Benchmark and any issues arising with regards to this, for example employer engagement or progression arrangements. It should also help us to identify good practice that will inform our future work;
- 3.21. Recognising the importance of the **student voice** and experience. We have commissioned the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to assess part-time student National Student Survey data. We will analyse the key findings to inform our policy developments;
- 3.22. Inviting **sector and student views** by:
  - o Consulting HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee, which includes sector and full- and part-time student representation;
  - o Coordinating, in February 2012, both a Part-time Study in Higher Education seminar and a HEFCW/HEA Foundation Degree conference.

#### **4. Initial findings: patterns, trends and evidence**

- 4.1. The above summary of our policies and actions underpinned our initial findings. Furthermore, our initial findings, presented below, are supported by wider-ranging analyses of part-time and other-related data and evidence. The key datasets and evidence are available on our website. The list of available data and evidence is attached as **Annex A**.
- 4.2. In addition, evidence from the February 2012 HEFCW part-time seminar will inform our future actions to support part-time study and progression from higher education<sup>19</sup>.
- 4.3. We implemented substantial changes to our policies and part-time-related funding mechanisms, as set out in Corporate Strategy and in response to *For our Future* expectations, from 2011/12. Therefore, while it is clearly premature to begin to assess the impact of these measures, we have a range of benchmarks against which we will assess sector progress. However, our policy implementation is taking effect within the context of the continuing economic downturn and wider changes to HE policy within Wales and the UK. We recognise that, within this broader context, HEFCW and the sector have limited control over some factors influencing part-time supply and demand and that there may be unintended consequences to part-time study of broader HE policy changes.

##### UK part-time market trends 2006/07 to 2010/11

- 4.4. In 2010/11 there were 1,912,578 undergraduate enrolments at UK HEIs, of which **29%** (545,248) **were part-time undergraduate enrolments**.
- 4.5. Headline figures indicate a decline of **8%** in part-time enrolments at UK HEIs from 2006/07 to 2010/11 from **593,310 to 545,248**. For the UK there were drops in part-

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<sup>18</sup> For further information see HEFCW Council paper reference number HEFCW/12/10

<sup>19</sup> HEFCW Part-time study in higher education and progression seminar, 23 February 2011.

time enrolments year-on-year, except between 2007/08 and 2008/09<sup>20</sup>. For Wales there were drops in part-time enrolments year on year for all years. The biggest drop in part-time enrolments for the UK was between 2009/10 and 2010/11 while the biggest drop for Wales was between 2008/09 and 2009/10.

- 4.6. In 2010/11 there were **109,190 undergraduate enrolments at HEIs in Wales, 31% (33,493)** of which were part-time. During the same period, at English HEIs there were 1,597,211 undergraduate enrolments, **30%** (471,791) of which were part-time and at Scottish HEIs there were 165,493 undergraduate enrolments, **18%** (30,110) of which were part-time.
- 4.7. We noted in the report's introduction the reason for our focus on undergraduate-level provision. However, it is interesting to note, by comparison with undergraduate trends, that **total UK part-time postgraduate first year enrolments increased by 12%** between 2005/06 and 2010/11 (to 127,924). In comparison, **in Wales part-time postgraduate first year enrolments increased by 40% over the same period**, and the number of these enrolments increasing in the rest of the UK by 11% between 2005/06 and 2010/11.

#### Wales part-time patterns and evidence 2006/07 to 2010/11

- 4.8. The following table provides an overview of part-time enrolments in Welsh HEIs in 2010/11. It shows that there were **33,493 part-time undergraduate enrolments** at Welsh HEIs. The Open University in Wales had the largest number (8,613), accounting for 26% of total part-time undergraduate enrolments at Welsh HEIs. University of Glamorgan, Cardiff University, University of Wales, Newport and Glyndŵr University each had around 4,000 part-time undergraduate enrolments. Business and administrative studies (3,026), education (5,920) and combined studies (7,516) were the most popular subjects.

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<sup>20</sup> Equivalent data for Wales can be found in paragraph 4.13.

**Part-time undergraduate enrolments at Welsh HEIs by subject and HEI, 2010/11**

Subject code	Subject group	University of Glamorgan	Aberystwyth University	Bangor University	Cardiff University	UoW Trinity Saint David	Swansea University	Cardiff Metropolitan University	UoW Newport	Glyndŵr University	Swansea Metropolitan University	Open University in Wales	Total enrolments
1	Medicine & dentistry	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
2	Subjects allied to medicine	918	0	327	454	0	515	38	8	353	52	111	2,775
3	Biological sciences	142	61	40	0	4	6	59	26	29	5	751	1,122
5	Agriculture & related subjects	46	64	11	0	30	0	20	0	1	6	0	178
6	Physical sciences	193	11	19	0	7	0	21	0	2	0	378	630
7	Mathematical sciences	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	272	277
8	Computer science	167	12	6	0	3	237	14	48	151	38	351	1,025
9	Engineering & technology	494	0	7	0	0	1	8	577	791	238	199	2,315
A	Architecture, building & planning	487	0	0	0	0	0	136	33	121	32	0	809
B	Social studies	245	13	68	0	90	9	119	921	309	9	944	2,727
C	Law	28	20	3	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	181	250
D	Business & administrative studies	1,005	7	11	0	107	22	4	751	239	374	507	3,026
E	Mass communications & documentation	9	170	4	0	4	0	0	0	26	1	0	213
F	Languages	41	440	51	0	406	190	0	3	1,282	6	428	2,845
G	Historical & philosophical studies	5	58	23	52	223	358	0	43	40	1	498	1,299
H	Creative arts & design	22	101	88	0	6	32	151	3	27	107	31	567
I	Education	357	991	356	85	1,217	66	271	1,699	352	307	220	5,920
J	Combined	10	0	0	3,338	26	398	0	0	0	0	3,744	7,516
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,169</b>	<b>1,949</b>	<b>1,014</b>	<b>3,930</b>	<b>2,121</b>	<b>1,832</b>	<b>841</b>	<b>4,129</b>	<b>3,721</b>	<b>1,174</b>	<b>8,613</b>	<b>33,493</b>

Source: HESA student record 2010/11

Enrolments by subject have been calculated using apportionment, that is, for example if an student is studying a course which is 50% mathematics and 50% computing then the student is counted as 0.5 in mathematical sciences and 0.5 in computer science. Due to rounding totals may not appear to be the sum of individual data which contain decimal places.

- 4.9. An analysis of part-time data relating to Welsh HEIs indicates that, between 2006/07 and 2010/11, some institutions reviewed their part-time portfolio and, based on academic or strategic rationale, withdrew part-time provision in some subject areas and/or delivery modes. The Universities of Bangor, Cardiff, Glamorgan, plus University of Wales Trinity Saint David, fall into this category.
- 4.10. In this context it is important to recognise that changes in the strategic direction of one or two HEIs in Wales can potentially impact significantly on overall Welsh sector performance. This effect is the result of a relatively small part-time market distributed unevenly across all Welsh HEIs as the table above indicates.
- 4.11. The reductions at two institutions require particular comment. Across the five-year period the number of **part-time enrolments at University of Glamorgan** nearly halved: dropping from 8,052 in 2006/07 to 4,169 in 2010/11. This drop represents **38 per cent of the drop seen in the sector in total**. In addition, the proportion of part-time enrolments at University of Glamorgan decreased by 17 percentage points from 43% to 26%. This decrease over the five-year period has been due to a range of factors, including a reduction in Wales-wide part-time, franchised provision and bite-sized learning, where retention and progression was poor, and a response to increased demand for full-time study.
- 4.12. **University of Wales Trinity Saint David's** part-time figures also contribute to the current trend. Across the five-year period the number of part-time enrolments dropped by 69 per cent from 6,762 in 2006/07 to 2,121 in 2010/11. **This drop represents 46 per cent of the drop seen in the sector in total**. In addition, the proportion of part-time undergraduate enrolments has fallen by 33 percentage points from 74% in 2006/07 to 41% in 2010/11. These changes arise from a portfolio review following the merger with University of Wales Lampeter.
- 4.13. Excluding the exceptional University of Wales Trinity Saint David figures, enrolments in Wales decreased by **16%** overall **between 2006/07 and 2010/11**, including University of Wales Trinity Saint David figures, the decrease was 24%.
- 4.14. More recently, and excluding University of Wales Trinity Saint David's figures, total part-time enrolments in Wales in 2010/11, compared with 2009/10, fell by **2%**. This compares with a decrease of **6% in England** and **9% in Scotland**, over the same period. Excluding Open University data, eight of the nine English regions experienced the same or a greater decrease in the percentage of part-time enrolments during this period as Wales.
- 4.15. However, against these trends, one institution in Wales has seen significant increases in part-time enrolments during the period 2006/07 to 2010/11. The enrolments of the Open University in Wales have **increased by 45%** in the period 2006/07 to 2010/11, from **5,958, to 8,613**, with enrolments increasing in each year. However, this growth has not offset the overall decline in part-time enrolments in Wales.
- 4.16. Within this context of an overall decline in UK part-time numbers, similarly reflected in part-time trends in Wales, an analysis of **part-time undergraduate and part-time foundation degree** data, 2006/07 to 2010/11 by a range of indicators, identifies some different enrolment patterns. We recognise in presenting this data that the volume of part-time undergraduate enrolments is far greater than part-time foundation degree enrolments. In addition, when absolute numbers in a category are low, small changes in these numbers lead to very large percentage differences. Therefore, there are limitations to the conclusions to be drawn from any comparisons.

- 4.17. **Part-time undergraduate enrolments at Welsh HEIs and FEIs** in 2010/11 were **34,052 students**, compared with **1,410 part-time foundation degree enrolments** across both Welsh sectors over the same period.

#### Part-time undergraduate enrolments

- 4.18. Turning firstly to part-time **undergraduate enrolments** at Welsh HEIs and FEIs these numbers **fell by 23%** from 44,159 to 34,052 between 2006/07 to 2010/11.
- 4.19. Part-time undergraduate enrolments fell at ten out of eleven HEIs in Wales. The number of part-time undergraduate enrolments at each FEI increased but **enrolments at FEIs accounted for less than 2% of all part-time undergraduate enrolments** in 2010/11.
- 4.20. Undergraduate **enrolments at Welsh HEIs from FEIs in Wales (excluding those applying via UCAS)** increased by **35.5%** from 7,125 in 2007/08 to 9,652 in 2009/10. There is a growing tendency towards students continuing their studies in their own region, with growth in regional study in the **South West Wales (at 10.4%)** and **North and Mid Wales (at 10.7%)** being more marked than in **South East Wales (at 7.2%)**.
- 4.21. In 2010/11, **8%** of part-time **undergraduate entrants at Welsh HEIs were from low participation neighbourhoods**. This proportion is the same as the UK HEI proportion.
- 4.22. The proportion of part-time **undergraduate degree entrants to Welsh HEIs from Communities First areas** was **16%** in 2010/11.
- 4.23. The proportions of part-time **undergraduate entrants** to Welsh HEIs by age have remained relatively stable over the five-year period. In 2010/11, 55% were aged 30 years and over, 30% were aged 21 to 29 years and 14% were aged 20 and under.
- 4.24. The proportion of **male** part-time **undergraduate entrants** remained around 40% across the period. In 2010/11 the percentage of **female part-time undergraduate entrants** varied from 8% for those studying engineering and technology, to 87% studying subjects allied to medicine. Subjects where the proportion of **females** was less than 50% were languages (46%), mass communications and documentation (45%), computer sciences (34%), physical sciences (24%) architecture, building and planning (20%) and engineering and technology (8%).
- 4.25. In 2010/11 the most popular subjects for part-time **undergraduate entrants** were combined subjects, education, languages, subjects allied to medicine and business and administrative studies.

#### Part-time foundation degree patterns

- 4.26. Turning to part-time **foundation degree** patterns of engagement, it can be seen that:
- 4.27. Between 2006/07 and 2010/11, part-time enrolments on **foundation degrees at Welsh HEIs and FEIs** rose by **44%** from 981 to 1,410 with part-time enrolments on foundation degrees increasing at six out of the nine HEIs and at FEIs with foundation degree provision;
- 4.28. The proportion of foundation degree enrolments at Welsh HEIs which were part-time fell by 12 percentage points from **58% to 46%** across the period;

- 4.29. The proportion of part-time **foundation degree entrants from Communities First areas** was **14%** in 2010/11, a proportion which remained relatively stable across the five- year period<sup>21</sup>.
- 4.30. In 2010/11, **9%** of part-time **foundation degree entrants at Welsh HEIs were from low participation neighbourhoods**. This proportion is lower than the proportion of these entrants at UK HEIs (13 per cent);
- 4.31. The age profile of part-time **foundation degree entrants** has fluctuated over the period 2006/07 to 2010/11. In 2010/11 48% of **part-time foundation degree entrants** were aged 30 years and over, 37% were aged between 21 and 29 years and 15% were aged 20 and under;
- 4.32. The proportion of **male** foundation degree entrants increased from 21% in 2006/07 to 23% in 2010/11 and in the same year the percentage of **female** part-time foundation degree entrants varied from 0% for those studying mass communications and documentation to 94% studying education (the numbers studying mass communications and documentation were very small). Subjects where the proportion of females was less than 50% were biological sciences (26%) architecture, building and planning (22%), computer science (22%) and engineering and technology (8%);
- 4.33. In 2010/11 the most popular subjects for part-time **foundation degree entrants** were education, business and administrative studies, social studies and engineering and technology. In each of the first two years of the period engineering and technology represented **5%** or less of all part-time foundation degree provision, but this rose to around **10%** in each of the last three years of the period. Although **over a tenth** of part-time foundation degree entrants studied subjects allied to medicine in each of the first three years of the period, this fell to **5%** in 2009/10, rising slightly to **7%** in 2010/11;

#### Evidence

- 4.34. The 2010 *Research into Part-time Higher Education Supply and Demand* report indicates that some institutions consider that the cost of part-time provision is higher than for full time: *'because "of transactional costs" of enrolling and providing core services ... the additional costs of recruitment and additional costs for provision and support outside standard hours*<sup>22</sup>. The report suggests that, with the exception of the Open University in Wales, Welsh HEIs might be reluctant to invest in distance learning provision, particularly for undergraduate provision, because of high start-up costs and additional complexities of quality assurance issues<sup>23</sup>. It also reports that increasing the availability of on-campus or outreach resources for part-time learners has substantial financial implications. HEFCW's Student Experience Teaching and Quality Committee endorsed these findings at its February 2012 meeting.
- 4.35. An analysis of qualifications on entry which are at an equivalent or higher level than the qualification subsequently aimed for, in 2010/11, shows that **2%** of **full-time undergraduate enrolments** at Welsh HEIs had a qualification at the same level, or a higher level, than the qualification they were subsequently aiming for<sup>24</sup>. In the same year, the **percentage of part-time enrolments at Welsh HEIs** with a qualification at the same level, or a higher level, than the qualification subsequently aimed for, was significantly higher at **36%**. At individual Welsh HEIs this percentage ranged from **15%**

<sup>21</sup> Our data includes both enrolments (the total number of people on courses) and entrants (first year enrolments only). Entrants provide an indication of changing demand as these figures are undiluted by subsequent year second and third year enrolments.

<sup>22</sup> [Research into Part-time Higher Education Supply and Demand](#) (p.12)

<sup>23</sup> Quality assurance issues relate both to the product and support offered.

<sup>24</sup> This analysis updates previous analysis and is based on HEFCW fundable students. The population differs from HESA standard registration population which has been used for the majority of part-time analyses undertaken.

to 62%, and at four HEIs this figure was greater than the sector figure of 36%. While the proportion of undergraduate enrolments with a first degree is similar to the picture for full-time undergraduates above, for **part-time enrolments with a first degree** the percentage already holding a first degree is 26%, with this figure ranging from 11% to 58% at individual HEIs and with **three HEIs** having a greater figure than the sector figure of 26%.

## 5. Conclusions and future actions

- 5.1. Our assessment of part-time HE provision and progression from FE suggests to us a number of conclusions and initial actions set out below.

### Conclusions

- 5.2. The part-time offer at HEIs in Wales is diverse providing higher level study opportunities at undergraduate, foundation degree, HNC/HND, Access Diploma and small, bite-size accredited and non-accredited provision for people of all ages.
- 5.3. The diversity of part-time provision is a response to meeting different, complex and dynamic market needs, including those related to:
- **widening access and increasing social mobility** for people facing the highest barriers to fulfilling their potential, moving out of poverty and contributing effectively to the shaping of a democratic, civilised and inclusive society;
  - **supporting equality and diversity** for people unable to sustain intensive study including parents, carers and disabled people;
  - **up-skilling and re-skilling** by supporting workforce development, economic renewal and enabling people to respond to economic, technological and other work-related changes, including redundancy; and
  - **continuing professional development** at postgraduate and higher levels by maximising the potential of individuals already in work and seeking professional development to contribute to driving and shaping economic change in Wales and beyond.
- 5.4. The multi-faceted nature of the part-time market requires **policy development to be sufficiently sensitive to the requirements of each segment**. Part-time provision operates within the context of larger full-time markets and full-time policy developments can impact on, or have unintended consequences for, some aspects of part-time provision.
- 5.5. Currently, demand for full-time first degree provision is strong, thereby potentially **reducing the incentive for HEIs to explore new delivery models**. However, the cap on student numbers might encourage some growth in part-time provision. This may depend on judgements about the return on investment in this market, particularly when the sector considers part-time provision as servicing an expensive and volatile market where both demand and a return on investment is uncertain. While HEIs responded well to the development of new part-time Foundation Degree provision it was underpinned by substantial additional resources, which may not be available on the same scale for expanding part-time provision in the current climate.
- 5.6. We commissioned a short report on *Employer Engagement with Part-time Higher Education* (March 2012) to inform further our understanding of employer demand. This report's findings and our analysis of the part-time data available on a UK, Wales and a regional basis, set out above, **do not enable us to confirm that there is unmet demand** for part-time places or under-supply of provision. While various reports draw attention to higher-level skills needs, we can find little clear evidence of significant

employer demand for substantially increased part-time, higher-level skills provision<sup>25</sup>. However, flexible, part-time provision, including bite-sized accredited opportunities can make an effective contribution to maximising opportunities for participation and delivering a suitably skilled workforce, as outlined above. We will assess on an ongoing basis the balance of part-time, full-time and other modes of study and discuss with Welsh Government officials an optimum balance of provision and opportunities for enhancing, and barriers to increasing, part-time supply and demand to achieve this.

- 5.7. The HEFCW Corporate Strategy measure to increase part-time student numbers, and deliver related *For our Future* expectations was set before the planned introduction of higher part-time fees and support and in a continuing uncertain economic environment. To make progress towards the part-time measure, the **use of additional funding levers** within the bounds of our funding settlement could encourage HEIs to increase supply. In this context we recognise that effecting change with limited financial incentives will be challenging.
- 5.8. While encouraging HEIs to increase the supply of part-time provision, we are mindful that the planned introduction of higher-level part-time fees may impact negatively on demand by employers and more particularly mature employees with a range of existing personal financial commitments and widening access learners. Discussions with the sector and other stakeholders strongly suggest that the part-time market is likely to be significantly more **price sensitive** than the full-time market, as the part-time learner age profile is older, with many part-time learners responsible for a broader range of existing family and lifestyle financial commitments than younger students. While part-time learners will no longer face up-front costs when accessing higher education and they will be supported by a student loan offsetting an element of the fee costs, at this stage, we are unclear whether mature learners will be more debt averse than younger learners or the extent of the impact of fees on demand in the short or medium term.
- 5.9. The delay in the postponement of the implementation of the new **part-time fees and support regime** to 2013/14 has been welcomed both by us and the sector, enabling further detailed consideration of the emerging policy implications. However, there is a risk that a lack of clarity in Wales on fees and support mechanisms, in comparison with other parts of the UK, might impact negatively on already fragile markets.
- 5.10. Our more recent research suggests that key provision to up-skill, re-skill, encourage social mobility and develop a knowledge based economy would be negatively affected by the removal of **funding for students having previously studied for qualifications at an equivalent or higher level than the qualification subsequently aimed for**, thereby militating against *For our Future* expectations. Institutions with significant part-time provision, such as the Open University in Wales, currently the only HEI experiencing increased enrolments year on year, would be most disadvantaged by such changes and it would be more difficult to incentivise HEIs to fully engage with high-level, employer-focussed provision.
- 5.11. Given that the recent fees and funding changes relating to full-time students across the UK, and the policy differences in different parts of the UK, will take some time to be clearly understood by schools and FEIs, applicants and their advisers, a **Welsh Government national part-time fees and funding campaign** could raise the profile

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<sup>25</sup> *Employer Engagement with Part-time Higher Education (March 2012) p33* 'Going forward, while there is much evidence that Wales and the UK more generally needs to invest in higher-level skills, there is relatively little evidence of a large increase in employers' demand for higher-level skills. Within the private sector, most of the employers we interviewed did not believe the future pattern of demand would change significantly over the next few years.' The report is available at: [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy\\_areas/widening\\_access/part\\_time\\_provision.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy_areas/widening_access/part_time_provision.aspx)

of the Welsh Government's continued support of all learners' with the potential to benefit from higher education, rather than their ability to pay.

- 5.12. As we work with the sector to embed and extend the **HE regional agenda** we will consider further the extent to which part-time provision, including employer-focussed provision, is coordinated in each region, to ensure collaborative regional developments are underpinned by local learner needs and labour market information. Regional specialism, by level, subject, location or by collaborative partnership may be an effective way of extending part-time provision and progression pathways. The advanced reconfiguration of structures in the South West region to create a dual sector university will enhance progression routes from FE to HE. Similarly, the outcomes of the review of HE provision in North East Wales will inform our consideration of a comprehensive HE regional offering. This review will assist the Welsh Government and HEFCW in: determining the extent to which existing patterns of provision provide a substantial and sufficient offering; proposing new or improved models of delivery that take account of the demographic, social or economic profiles of NE Wales; and recognising the need for coherence in the delivery of further and higher education in the region. In South East Wales closer collaboration with regional FEIs and the improved effectiveness of the HE regional partnership would contribute to more coordinated and responsive provision, including to part-time employer-focussed needs and learner demand.
- 5.13. The progression report commissioned to provide us with underpinning evidence for our conclusions was remitted to focus on **FE to HE progression and HE provision within FE** at regional level. Moreover, other progression routes to part-time HE provision for learners of all ages are supported by widening access to HE projects and the regional, collaborative Reaching Wider Programme. This provision encompasses adult community outreach and Communities First developments, lifelong learning and work-based learning provision with trades' unions and employer organisations. Progression into HE from these routes contribute to a diverse HE community, with learners aged 30 to 65+ years old accounting for 55% of total part-time undergraduate learners in 2010/11.
- 5.14. In addition, there may be some early indications of increased demand from school leavers for part-time online HE study pathways, possibly as a result of full-time places becoming increasingly competitive<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, we recognise that increasingly many young full-time learners combine study and employment to meet the costs of study. It may be possible to grow the younger age part-time market making part-time HE study, alongside casual employment, an attractive and affordable option. For HEIs this may require reviewing any preconceptions of the typical part-time learner.
- 5.15. Foundation Degree developments (with progression routes to honours degrees) provide new models for the development of higher-level skills (undergraduate apprenticeships) for new entrants to the workforce. We are aware of good practice in this area, in line with Sector Skills Council (SSC) frameworks, including specialist provision through collaborative arrangements, as showcased in the CQFW draft regional reports commissioned to support our part-time study work. Such collaborative examples of provision demonstrate the existence of clear gateways to higher education services and provision informed by regional employer need. Given such developments we could conclude that employer demand might be stimulated further by SSC kite-marked HE provision.
- 5.16. Online learning, used extensively by the Open University in Wales, is also being developed by HEIs, often as part of blended learning packages. Such developments

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the OU in Wales undergraduate enrolments aged 20 years or under increased from 261(8%) in 2006/07 to 473 (11%) in 2010/11. DBIS research into expanding and improving part-time study, reporting in November 2012, will assess the feasibility of increasing the number of young, part-time enrolments.

will also contribute to providing high quality learning infrastructure which is responsive to the needs of bilingual learners. As on-line learning becomes a more significant element of HEIs' learning and teaching portfolio we will want to ensure that it addresses the needs of full- and part-time learners and is sufficiently agile to respond to technological advances and learners' demands.

#### Future actions

- 5.17. In 2012-13, and aligned with our next Corporate Strategy, we will develop and publish our action plan for part-time provision to provide a clearer articulation of our strategic intentions for part-time provision in Wales. Our actions will include:
- 5.18. working with Welsh Government officials to **finalise and implement the new part-time fees and support arrangements;**
- 5.19. working with officials of the Welsh Government to **take forward the recommendations of its HE in FE review;**
- 5.20. implementing the new **HEFCW Skills and Employability Framework**, the **Foundation Degree policy** and our **Widening Access Strategic Approach and Plan;**
- 5.21. assessing the effect of our **funding mechanisms** to ensure that they sufficiently incentivise and increase part-time provision and implementing further changes as appropriate;
- 5.22. assessing the part-time offer at HEIs where provision is buoyant and **working with those HEIs who can do more to increase provision;**
- 5.23. ensuring that institutional **widening access provision and regional Reaching Wider Partnerships** contribute fully to promoting progression routes from FE and other pathways to part-time undergraduate and post-graduate provision;
- 5.24. **encouraging the sector to work further to identify and respond to employer training needs**, by working with both employers and employer organisations, to inform supply-side provision;
- 5.25. identifying opportunities for further **partnerships and collaborations** to maximise the availability of accessible part-time and flexible provision regionally;
- 5.26. with the three HE regional groups, extending and supporting **FE to HE progression** opportunities, including through formal and informal collaboration and other relationships. We will examine regional provision further to ensure a more robust response to part-time provision, particularly in the South East Wales region;
- 5.27. as Apprenticeship frameworks are developed across vocational sectors to include higher level apprenticeships, we will engage with the sector, employers and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to offer the more theoretical 'off the job training' elements of **higher level Apprenticeships;**
- 5.28. considering, with UCAS and other stakeholders, the outcomes of its trial developments to display part-time courses for the 2013 application cycle, working initially with the Open University to display flexible courses. This development, if successfully rolled-out to all UK HEIs, will raise awareness of part-time opportunities for learners unable to access full-time places given the cap on student places and, for the first time, provides part-time applicants with a **national part-time course portal.**

- 5.29. funding the **Cadarn learning portal** (North and Mid Wales regional strategy group) regionally, but with national potential, to provide information and guidance to both full- and part-time learners;
- 5.30. continuing to **monitor UK and Welsh trends** in part-time provision with the aim of improving, or at least equalling, growth rates in part-time provision in parts of the UK;
- 5.31. analysing sector **progress against our Corporate Strategy part-time measure** and evaluating data relating to part-time markets to identify significant trends, including the impact of the new fees and support regime on diverse market segments including widening access cohorts, CPD and employer-focussed provision;
- 5.32. commissioning further research and/or evaluations of part-time provision to ensure we deliver *For our Future* expectations.

## Annex A

Data and evidence supporting the initial findings and conclusion in this report are available on our website at: [www.hefcw.ac.uk/policyareas/wideningaccess/parttimeprovision](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policyareas/wideningaccess/parttimeprovision)

### Data

- i. Table 1A: enrolments on **foundation degrees** at Welsh HEIs and Welsh FEIs by **institution and mode**
- ii. Table 1B: enrolments on all **undergraduate courses** at Welsh HEIs and FEIs by **institution and mode**
- iii. Table 2a: Part-time enrolments on **foundation degrees** at Welsh HEIs and Welsh FEIs by **institution and entrant status**
- iv. Table 2b: Part-time enrolments on all **undergraduate courses** at Welsh HEIs and Welsh FEIs by **institution and entrant status**
- v. Table 3: Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **qualification type**;
- vi. Table 4a Part-time **foundation degree entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **subject and gender**
- vii. Table 4b Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **subject and gender**
- viii. Table 5a Part-time **foundation degree entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **age group**
- ix. Table 5b Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **age group**
- x. Table 6a Part-time **foundation degree entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **ethnicity**
- xi. Table 6b Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **ethnicity**
- xii. Table 7a Part-time **foundation degree entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **disability**
- xiii. Table 7b Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **disability**
- xiv. Table 8a Part-time **foundation degree entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **Communities First area**
- xv. Table 8b Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **Communities First area**
- xvi. Table 9a Part-time **foundation degree entrants by low participation neighbourhood or not, at Welsh HEIs, at UK HEIs**
- xvii. Table 9b Part-time **undergraduate entrants by low participation neighbourhood or not, at Welsh HEIs, at UK HEIs**
- xviii. Table 10a Part-time **foundation degree entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **highest qualification on entry**
- xix. Table 10b Part-time **undergraduate entrants** at Welsh HEIs by **highest qualification on entry**

### Evidence

- xx. Allocations for the Part-time Fee Waiver by HEI 2008/09 to 2010/11;
- xxi. Information about the National HE STEM Programme;
- xxii. Information about foundation degree and work-based learning projects;
- xxiii. *Employer Engagement with Higher Education*, Oldbell3, March 2012;
- xxiv. A summary of the CQFW, HEFCW, Colegau Cymru progression mapping projects' conclusions.