

Agreement on Skills and Employability for Wales

This is an Agreement between the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Higher Education Wales (HEW), CBI Wales and NUS Wales that aims to increase the employment of graduates from universities in Wales. Our vision is to support growth in the provision of highly skilled, quality jobs across Wales, and to produce graduates that are able to demonstrate and communicate their value to prospective employers - in Wales and further afield.

The challenge

Students expect good quality graduate level jobs when they graduate. They also expect to be employable. At the same time, employers need innovative graduates in order to help them compete in a global knowledge economy. This will require all of us to work differently to deliver the Welsh Government's aspirations for a buoyant economy.

Better and higher skills levels are crucial to increasing Wales' productivity. This in turn raises employment levels by increasing business growth, entrepreneurship and the attractiveness of Wales as a place for investment and research partnerships. The Welsh Government's aspirations for social justice can only be built on the back of economic prosperity and the expansion of high level educational and employment opportunities for graduates across Wales.

In common with the rest of the UK, Wales has developed a suite of policies to help businesses (especially SMEs) weather the current recession and lay the foundations for economic recovery. The supply of graduate jobs is key to this, and improving their employability skills is not an elite agenda to benefit a minority; rather it is about creating a high skill economy from which all can benefit. Against this backdrop, the CBI states that employability skills (self-management, team working, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication, application of numeracy, application of IT) continue to be the most important factors looked for by employers of graduates, even above degree subject studied.

Our response

This **Agreement** – underpinned by a detailed **Action Plan** – is our response to this challenge.

It commits 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 least through revitalising part-time study options).

It calls on universities, student unions, employers and other partners to build on the diversity, innovation and flexibility already inherent in the higher education system and improve the employability skills we give our graduates, to equip them for immediate employment and for our future economy.

Our universities have a critical role in delivering this ambition and have been widely acknowledged as being at the forefront of employability initiatives in the UK – the *GO Wales* graduate employability programme is now in its tenth successful year, and universities have embedded longstanding approaches to work experience and employability into their planning processes.

We believe that their existing activity deserves greater recognition, but are in no doubt that current approaches need to be challenged again: the rest of the world is not standing still.

Our commitment

To deliver this Agreement, we propose an **Action Plan** that brings together activities under three priority areas where, we agree, future effort should be focused:

- Work placements and work experience
- Employer approved courses
- Embedding employability skills across all higher education curricula.

The Agreement and Action Plan provide the framework for improvement and progress by drawing together activities already being carried out by a range of partners, and committing to develop them further to ensure universities and employers across Wales share and build on good practice.

We will demonstrate how Wales takes seriously the skills, ‘work-readiness’ and future proofing of all its students and graduates by:

- showcasing examples of leading practice from across the HE sector
- committing to take further action to build upon best practice through new and innovative activity
- encouraging students and employers to take full advantage of the expertise that exists in Wales’ universities
- changing attitudes to give students and employers greater understanding of what they can expect from higher education in Wales
- recognising the importance of Welsh medium skills, including the specific advantage they can give within the workplace

What next?

The signatories to this **Agreement** will start by testing the proposed activities and performance indicators set out in the **Action Plan** on student, graduate and employer groups.

In defining outcomes and targets, we will make common cause with other partner organisations with expertise in this area to ensure we can deliver the Action Plan. We will report progress through the HEFCW website.