



Stakeholder and Partner Engagement

HEFCW

Executive Summary

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1. Background and Methodology

This is a summary of the full results of the ‘Stakeholder and Partner Engagement’ report based on research carried out by Strategic Research and Insight (SRI) on behalf of HEFCW. The research took place between May and July 2019.

The survey of stakeholders and partners involved a two stage process:

- **Stage 1:** An online bilingual survey of stakeholders and partners based on a list compiled by HEFCW. Those selected reflected the wide range of different roles in the organisations which HEFCW has regular contact with in Wales and more widely in the UK. The list comprised 240 contacts and on closing, 34% of those invited to participate took part (82 respondents). 49 responses were from stakeholders within institutions and 33 from partners based in Wales or elsewhere in the UK.
- **Stage 2:** Follow up telephone depth interviews with a selection of those initially responding to the online survey. The 26 participants gave further detail on some of the issues raised in the online survey.

The results were analysed and key findings used to develop the report which was presented to the HEFCW Council and to Staff in September 2019.

2. Summary of Findings

Most are familiar with HEFCW’s work and have favourable impression of HEFCW

A quarter (25%) of respondents said they felt that they knew the work of HEFCW very well, while around three fifths (58%) said they knew a fair amount about the work.

More than four fifths (84%) of respondents said they had a favourable opinion or impression of HEFCW. Only one individual (1%) gave an unfavourable opinion.

Partnership working strengths:

The strengths of HEFCW’s partnership working were seen to be its personal and tailored approach, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and its strong visibility.

How to further develop partnership working:

There was a desire for clearer timelines and improved forward planning, and to maintain the recent improvements in contact and visibility.

Mixed perceptions about HEFCW’s independence from Welsh Government

Almost two thirds (64%) agreed to some extent that HEFCW operates independently of Welsh Government but almost a fifth (18%) disagreed which was the highest negative perception rating.

However, around three quarters of respondents (74%) agreed to some extent that HEFCW represents the sector fairly to Welsh Government.

Overall perceptions of HEFCW are positive, but many perceive HEFCW to be bureaucratic	<p>This view was related to the functions it performs, particularly relating to funding and regulation. While HEFCW's approach is generally seen as more favourable when compared to similar organisations, some felt there was room for improvement, especially with fee and access planning.</p>
HEFCW's staff and reputation are highly rated, but there are mixed views on HEFCW's public profile	<p>Around 9 in 10 (88%) rated the quality of the staff as good, including over half (51%) who rated them as 'very good'. No respondents rated HEFCW's staff negatively in the survey. Some commented in the depth interviews that new staff who had been appointed had particularly enhanced relationships.</p> <p>A majority also rated the reputation of the organisation (83%) and the effectiveness of the HEFCW Council (73%) positively.</p> <p>While not all respondents rated HEFCW's public profile positively (15% negative) and some had mixed views (21%), many suggested that HEFCW does not need to have an outwardly public profile as it has little requirement for communication with the general public.</p>
Generally good interaction with HEFCW but work needed in some areas	<p>Respondents were most positive about the level of interaction they receive from HEFCW about funding (74%) and statistics and data collection (74%). They were most negative about the level of interaction on fee and access planning and regulation (13% poor) and skills and employability (11%).</p>
Fee and access planning and regulation interactions are most in need of improvement	<p>While respondents recognised that the process is necessary, they felt that improvements could be made by revising the template to streamline it and make it shorter as well as less repetitious, changing the frequency of submission, setting more realistic and individualised targets, making outputs more engaging and allowing more time to complete and sign off documents in line with the academic year.</p>
High levels of satisfaction with the relationship with HEFCW and interactions have mostly improved	<p>Around half (51%) of respondents felt that their interactions with HEFCW had become better in the last two years, including nearly three fifths (57%) of institutions and around two fifths (42%) of partners.</p> <p>More than three quarters (79%) of respondents were satisfied with their relationship with HEFCW overall.</p>
Direct contact with HEFCW staff is the most common way of keeping up to date as well as the most useful	<p>Almost all (87%) of respondents keep up to date via direct contact with HEFCW, and an almost identical proportion (88%) identified this type of contact as the most useful they receive.</p> <p>Respondents wanted to know more about transparency in decision making, including how information provided by institutions is shared with the Council and the Council's decision-making process; funding, e.g. Innovation and Engagement Fund and funding formulae; shaping policy and working with Welsh Government; and HEFCW's role in future including planning for CTER.</p>

Ease of reaching staff has most improved, but the administrative burden and timeliness of official requests had worsened for many

When asked about specific areas of interaction, the majority of respondents felt that their experience had stayed the same for each interaction. However, 3 in 10 (30%) felt that the ease of reaching relevant staff had improved.

By contrast, a greater proportion felt that the administrative burden on institutions (24%) and the timeliness of office requests (14%) had deteriorated, compared to 8% and 5% that felt it had improved respectively.

What HEFCW does well:

Understanding of the industry, relationships with staff and effective engagement were most valued by respondents.

Priorities for the next two years according to respondents:

Funding and financial stability, e.g. ensuring funding mechanisms are 'fair' and reward quality, are sustainable for institutions and value for money for Welsh Government, support teaching/learning and research resources, and that the impact innovation and engagement funding in particular is measured and monitored.

Working towards/keeping the sector informed of future changes (e.g. CTER), including more clarity about the structural reform and its implications; communication to and engagement with institutions about the reform, including keeping the sector informed of key staff changes; publicising the positives of the change; and looking further ahead at changes the sector needs to make over the next 15 years.