

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Student well-being and health in higher education

Date: 30 April 2019
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To: Heads of higher education institutions and copied to Principals of further education colleges in Wales
Response by: 14 June 2019 and 31 March 2020
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This circular invites collaborative, funded proposals, led by universities in Wales, for strategic projects to improve and support student well-being and health in higher education. The circular also invites Well-being and Health Strategies from FY 2020-21.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Lywodraeth Cymru
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Introduction

1. This circular invites collaborative, funded proposals, led by universities in Wales, for strategic projects to increase the pace of change and improve practice in supporting student well-being and health in higher education (HE). The circular also invites Well-being and Health Strategies from FY 2020-21.
2. Student well-being and health is a broad term and a continuum¹. For the purposes of this circular and funding we are focusing on, and take the terms to include, student well-being and health, including good and poor mental health and suicide-safer approaches. We recognise that students with a diagnosed mental health or physical condition can have high-levels of well-being.
3. HEFCW's revised FY 2018-19 remit letter ([revised annex 1, February 2019](#)) includes an additional allocation of £2m to 'to support well-being and health in HE, including student mental health'. A further £300k is available from HEFCW's FY 2018-19 budget allocation, bringing the total funding available to £2.3m.

Background

4. HEFCW's well-being and health, including mental health, policy development is framed in the context of UK evidence, research, Welsh Government legislation, strategies and other expectations, as set out below.

The evidence base

5. HEFCW's equalities monitoring 2015/16 to 2017/18 is based on Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, which analyses the characteristics of staff and students at Welsh HEIs. Data for students at HEFCW directly funded HE provision at Welsh further education institutions (FEIs) have been included in our monitoring from 2017/18.
6. The number of students declaring themselves as having a mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder increased by 47% between 2015/16 and 2017/18.
7. In the UK, at least 95 university students took their own lives in 2016-17². These numbers are lower than for the general population of the same ages.

¹ We note the definition of well-being and health set out by UUK in Suicide-Safer Universities: 'well-being is understood in its broad sense to mean a time when a person is feeling good and functioning positively... It is possible to have high levels of well-being, yet to live with a diagnosed mental health condition.' (p25).

² Office for National Statistics data, reported in Suicide-Safer Universities, UUK.

Welsh Government expectations

8. Our policy development is underpinned by the following legislation:
 - i. [The Well-being of Future Generations Act \(2015\)](#) (the Act) provides the high-level framework for our well-being and health in HE policy development³. The Act's sustainability principle requires us, amongst other actions, to contribute to improving societal well-being, the Act's goals and ways of working. HEFCW's support of well-being and health in HE particularly contributes to the goals of a healthier Wales⁴, a more equal Wales⁵, a Wales of cohesive communities⁶ and a prosperous Wales⁷, although all seven goals are inter-dependent. Our way of working⁸, will enable us to work collaboratively, share outcomes, learn lessons from the past and tackle long-term challenges.
 - ii. the [Equalities Act](#) 2010 protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society for people. The Act defines some mental illness as having protected characteristics. Some people may be more likely to experience mental ill-health because of their protected characteristics⁹.
 - iii. [the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Act](#) (2015) is inclusive of all people in Wales, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. It aims to support those subject to violence and abuse, which impacts on well-being and mental health.
9. Key Welsh Government well-being and health-related strategies are included in our indicative overview of relevant strategies, guidance and frameworks set out in HEFCW's Strategic Approach to Wellbeing and Health which will be published shortly¹⁰. They include:
 - i. with Public Health Wales, the [Healthy and Sustainable Universities and Colleges Framework](#).
 - ii. [Together for Mental Health Strategy and Delivery Plan 2016-19](#);

³ The Act places duties on bodies such as HEFCW, working with partners, to think long-term, work better with people and communities, look to prevent problems and take a joined-up approach

⁴ A healthier Wales – 'A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood'; (p.6)

⁵ A more equal Wales – 'A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).' (p.6)

⁶ A Wales of cohesive communities - 'Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities'. (p.6)

⁷ A prosperous Wales' - A society 'which develops a skilled and well-educated population'. (p.6)

⁸ Aligned to the Act's five ways of working: long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, involvement. (p.7)

⁹ Protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race, religion and belief; sex; sexual orientation.

¹⁰ The title of the Strategic Approach to Well-being and Health may change.

- iii. [Talk to me Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Strategy for Wales 2015-2020](#); and

UK-wide approaches

10. HEFCW has mapped UK guidance and frameworks supporting well-being and health in HE to inform policy implementation.
11. A UK-wide framework, [#stepchange](#) (2017), published by Universities UK (UUK), aligns with the Well-being of Future Generations Act's sustainability principle and its five ways of working. #stepchange makes the case for mental health being a higher education strategic priority and advocates a whole university and whole system approach. The #stepchange framework can be applied to well-being and health approaches more generally.
12. UUK published [Suicide-Safer Universities](#) (2018) to make university communities safer. It includes a framework for developing a specific suicide 'prevention-intervention-postvention' strategy, as part of an overarching institution-wide mental health strategy.

HEFCW's policy development

13. HEFCW published guidance circular [W13/31HE](#) on promoting well-being and health (October 2013). Our policy development builds on that circular.
14. HEFCW's [remit letters in 2018-19 and 2019-20](#) set out Welsh Government expectations for HEFCW and its partners in relation to well-being and health, including mental health and suicide-safer approaches.
15. HEFCW is finalising its Strategic Approach to Well-being and Health, including mental health. The Approach will be underpinned by co-created action plans, the first of which relates to student mental health.
16. HEFCW and its partners will review institutions' Student Charters annually. The April 2019 review includes a proposals to include well-being and health from 2019/20.
17. We propose to work with institutions, students and their partners to:
 - enhance and sustain practice in supporting student well-being and health by encouraging the adoption of #stepchange and the Suicide-Safer Universities frameworks;
 - fund collaborative proposals; and
 - invite the submission of well-being and health strategies.

#stepchange and Suicide-Safer frameworks

18. All universities in Wales must commit to adopt, from 2019/20, #stepchange and Suicide-Safer Universities approaches, as set out the UUK reports.

Where universities would like to adopt alternative frameworks, we would need to understand their rationale for this. Universities should confirm their commitment to #stepchange and Suicide-Safer Universities, or otherwise, with their submission of proposals for funding and their well-being and health strategies.

Collaborative funded proposals

Funding methodology

19. A total of £2.3m is available to universities in Wales (including the Open University in Wales) to support collaborative well-being and health in HE proposals. The proposals should increase the pace of change, improve and sustain practice that can be shared across HE in Wales, and potentially more widely, to secure whole university and whole system change.
20. HEFCW's remit letter requires HEFCW to have due regard to regional coherence in allocating its funding. Therefore, we expect collaboration within regions or to clearly understand the rationale for non-regional collaborations. Universities should consider HE and FE regional partners and regional health board configurations, as well as national and regional third sector agencies, where appropriate.
21. We will calibrate allocations against successful proposals in line with the total funding available. We expect to fund no more than three regional proposals of up to £765,000. We will not accept proposals above £765,000. We reserve the right to fund projects on a partial basis or not fund proposals that do not fully meet our criteria.
22. We will not fund dissemination events, workshops nor similar project promotional activities. We will not fund capital investment unless there is a clear commitment from university partners to sustain it beyond the funding period.
23. The outcomes of funded proposals should be sustained through fee and access plan and/or strategic equality plan investment and universities' broader work to support the student experience, improve learning and teaching, retention and success.

Management structure

24. We are inviting proposals from partnerships which include at least two universities, one of which will be the project lead for funding and administrative purposes. We expect the lead partner to distribute, and account for, funding as appropriate. There must be a range of appropriate additional partners in the region/s. Students must be partners, including students at locations where HE is provided on a university's behalf, such

as franchise provision. A university can lead only one proposal, but it can be part of more than one.

Themes

25. We expect to fund no more than three regional, collaborative proposals. We will fund proposals framed around the following priorities¹¹, unless a strong case for other priorities is made:
 - i. **positive and healthy behaviours** for students and promoting healthy living;
 - ii. **support structures and mechanisms** for students with mental ill-health;
 - iii. **adopt a #stepchange theme; and**
 - iv. **student suicide-safer approaches** that take account of, and build on, UUK's Suicide-Safer Universities themes.
26. In accordance with our remit requirement, all proposals must demonstrate that they have taken account of the learning and strategic approaches set out in Suicide-Safer Universities.
27. Further details about these priority areas is provided in the proposal template. The criteria for the assessment of proposals is in **Annex A**.
28. We expect proposals to take account of Welsh language needs and the needs of key student groups that may require more or different support to ensure their well-being and health¹².

Consultation seminar, submission dates and assessment process

29. We will arrange a consultation seminar in May to discuss the funded proposals and will provide further details to regulated institutions by email.
30. Proposals must be submitted to us by **Friday 14 June 2019** on the template at **Annex B**. We may report the information provided to us in the templates to the Welsh Government as part of the reporting process for the use of this funding.
31. Proposals will be considered by a review panel. Review panels normally have external membership, including student representation, and are chaired by a member of HEFCW Council.

¹¹ Further information about these priorities is included in the annexed template.

¹² While the following list is not comprehensive and the following are not the only groups in need of support to maintain well-being and health, the UUK Suicide-Safer Universities report identifies students at greater risk as: bereaved students or those affected by suicide; asylum-seeker and refugee students; LGBTQ+ students; male students in terms of suicide, female students in terms of self-harm; students with experience of abuse, trauma, conflict or disaster. The Welsh Government's [Nation of Sanctuary Delivery Plan](#) (2019) references mental health conditions impacting on refugees and asylum seekers.

32. Timescales for the proposal process, with the well-being and health strategy timescales, are set out below.
33. We will allocate funding in one or more tranches, depending on the size and nature of the project.
34. We will require submission of an interim report in January 2020, with a further update up to twelve months later. We will share the interim reports with universities to inform their Well-being and Health Strategies and Strategic Equality Plan developments. We will report to the Welsh Government on the use of funding to date by the end of March 2020.
35. We reserve the right to withhold or claw back funding where there is unsatisfactory progress or performance.

Well-being and health strategies

36. The outcomes of the funded proposals should inform and be sustained by universities' well-being and health strategies from FY 2020-21. Strategies should align with and underpin Strategic Equality Plans 2020-25 and be submitted to us in **March 2020**. Strategies should be university-owned and may be submitted to us in the university's corporate style.
37. Strategies must take account of the #stepchange and Suicide-Safer Universities frameworks, or provide a strong rationale for not doing so. Where the pace of change, level of ambition or other aspect of the strategy is unclear, we will request further information.
38. Further information on the strategy development is provided in **Annex C**.

Timescales

HEFCW circular published	30 April 2019
Universities submit proposals	14 June 2019
HEFCW fund satisfactory proposals	From late July 2019
Interim proposal monitoring report to be submitted to HEFCW	January 2020
Universities to submit to HEFCW Well-being and Health Strategies	March 2020
Universities to submit to HEFCW final reports on funded proposals	July 2020

Further information / responses to

39. For further information, contact Jane Johns or Ryan Stokes (tel: 029 2085 9732/ 029 2085 9736; email jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk; ryan.stokes@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

40. We have undertaken impact assessment to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.
41. We have consulted with universities, students, their representative bodies and other partners in developing this guidance. We have sought to align the guidance to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Equalities Act and the Welsh Language Standards.
42. We will continue to impact assess the implementation of this policy and funding to ensure it achieves its objectives. To inform impact assessment, in relation to the Welsh language, we are inviting through this circular, responses to the following questions:
 - i. What **positive** or **adverse** effects will the proposals have on:
 - **opportunities** for persons to use the Welsh language and
 - **treating** the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?
 - ii. Could the proposals be changed to **increase positive** effects, or **decrease adverse** effects on:
 - **opportunities** for persons to use the Welsh language and
 - **treating** the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?
 - iii. Do the proposals have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act's seven wellbeing goals, Sustainable Development Principle and five ways of working?
43. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.

The criteria we will use for our assessment of proposals are as follows:

Strategic fit

- i. The extent of the fit with the purpose of the funding, which is: to increase the pace of change and improve practice in supporting student well-being and health in HE that can be shared across HE in Wales, and potentially more widely, to enable whole university and whole system change;
- ii. the extent of the fit with the themes set out above;
- iii. the explanation of how the proposal will deliver against the goals and ways of working of the Welsh Government's Future Generation's Act;
- iv. the extent of the fit with the UUK frameworks: #stepchange and/or Suicide-Safer Universities, where appropriate;

Description of activity

- v. the strength of the evidence-base justifying the activity in the proposal, including evidence of the gap the proposed activity is filling and that it is not duplicating existing provision;
- vi. the clarity of the proposal;
- vii. the level of the ambition;
- viii. the extent to which the outcomes will secure change in HE, including changing cultures;
- ix. the clarity of deliverables;
- x. the extent to which the methodology, learning and other outcomes are realistically transferable to other universities in Wales, including rural and urban settings;
- xi. the clarity of statements by each university partner confirming how the legacy from the proposals will be sustained after the funded period, for example through fee and access plans or Strategic Equality Plans;

Partnership:

- xii. the extent of the involvement of partners, over and above membership on steering groups;
- xiii. the extent of proposed student involvement in the co-creation of sustainable solutions to supporting well-being and health, as well as in developing, monitoring and reviewing the proposed outcomes;
- xiv. the extent to which the proposal takes account of, or aligns with, Welsh Government-funded College well-being proposals, where appropriate;
- xv. the extent to which the proposal evidences collaboration with other (non HE/FE) external partners, such as health boards or third sector organisations, where appropriate;

Other:

- xvi. confirmation that all regulated institution partners are committed to adopting #stepchange and Suicide-Safer Universities approaches from 2019/20.
- xvii. confirmation that the proposal has been impact assessed;
- xviii. confirmation that the proposal complies with Welsh Language Standards (2018).

Well-being and health, including mental health in higher education funded proposals 2019-20

Lead University:	
Collaborative Partners: <i>[HE, FE and other external]</i>	
Region/s: <i>[use the drop down menu]</i>	Choose an item.
Proposal Category: <i>[click to select]</i> See notes for further information on categories at the end of the template.	<input type="checkbox"/> positive and healthy behaviours for students promoting healthy living; <input type="checkbox"/> support structures and mechanisms for students with mental ill-health; <input type="checkbox"/> a #stepchange theme <input type="checkbox"/> suicide-safer approaches
Proposal Title:	

Proposal Lead:		Email/Telephone:	
Alternate Contact:		Email/Telephone:	

Section A: Proposal Outline
1. Proposal Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Please provide an overview of the collaborative project and activities (purpose, aims, priority groups, deliverables, longer-term outcomes etc.).</i> • <i>Describe how the project will contribute to the proposal categories in the table above.</i> • <i>Set out clearly how the funding proposal will contribute to increasing the pace of change and improving practice in supporting student well-being and health in HE.</i> <p style="text-align: center;">[max 750 words]</p>

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2. Provide information about the collaborative partners.

- *Please provide details (institution name, and person representing the institution on the project), the individual named contact of all collaborative partners (HEIs, FEIs, health-sector, third sector, etc).*
- *Describe the extent to which students are partners and have been involved.*
- *Describe briefly the extent of partner involvement over and above steering group (or similar) membership.*
- *Set out each university partner's commitment to sustaining the project's legacy after the funded period.*
- *Confirm the extent to which the proposal takes account of, or aligns with, Welsh Government-funded FE Colleges proposals, where appropriate.*

3. Provide evidence and data to make the case for supporting the proposal

- *Please provide a strong case for the proposal, including evidence of the gap the proposed activity is filling and confirming that it is not duplicating nor cutting across existing provision.*
- *Evidence of the project being innovative.*
- *Summarise the benefits of the project to the region, partners, Wales.*
- *Summarise the outcomes of the impact assessment.*

4. How will the project / activities meet the identified need?

- *Please set out the project methodology, key activities and timelines.*
- *Provide information setting out the project's level of ambition and the extent to which it would secure change and could change cultures.*
- *Provide specific information on how the proposal will contribute to/take account of [the Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) specifically the sustainability principle and ways of working.*
- *Set out how the project will take account of duties under the Equality Act, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act, the Welsh Government Nation of Sanctuary Strategy, as appropriate.*

5. Please provide information on the future sustainability of funded activities. What will be the legacy of this funding?

- Please provide information on outcomes and deliverables;
- Provide an assessment of how the learning and outcomes could be realistically transferable to other universities in Wales, including rural and urban settings;

**Section B:
Deliverables**

Deliverables should demonstrate that the activities will increase the pace of change and improve practice in supporting student well-being and health in higher education (HE). Initial monitoring on progress against these targets will be in **January 2019**.

Deliverables/outcomes description

Targets and dates targets achieved by
Targets should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound
We expect targets to be achieved by July 2020

Deliverable/outcome to be achieved:	Date to be achieved:
1.	
2.	
3. (etc)	
SMART target:	Date to be achieved:

**Section C:
Breakdown of Expenditure**

Agreed HEFCW funding will be provided to support of satisfactory well-being and health proposals. Please provide a full breakdown of expenditure below. Monitoring will be against this breakdown initially in **January 2020**. Once the breakdown of expenditure is submitted any changes / virements of funding must be discussed and agreed with HEFCW.

Expenditure description	Expenditure (£)
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1.	£
2.	£
3. Etc	£
Total Costs [NB if this exceeds the funding from HEFCW please explain where additional funding will be found]	£

Section D:**Regulatory Requirements**

NB: HEFCW may request further information / clarification on any of these areas

i) Welsh Language Standards (2018) <i>[Use the drop down menu]</i>	Choose an item.
ii) Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duties (Wales)	Choose an item.
iii) Equality Impact Assessment <i>[Use the drop down menu]</i>	Choose an item.
iv) Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) <i>[Use the drop down menu]</i>	Choose an item.
v) Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (2015)	Choose an item.

Section E:**Partner regulated institutions' commitment to adopt #stepchange and Suicide-Safer University approaches from 2019/20**

Vice-Chancellor of regulated institution	name	Signature

Signature: Vice-Chancellor of lead partner	
Date	Click or tap to enter a date.

Notes on the project categories

1. The following are examples of project proposals that may fall within the proposal categories. These examples are indicative and other projects may be appropriate:
 - i. **positive and healthy behaviours for students promoting healthy living.** Projects may include whole institution/whole system approaches to: improving students' well-being and health, including mental and emotional health and well-being; physical activity; healthy and sustainable food; substance use and misuse; personal and sexual health and relationships; sustainable environment; joint procurement of relevant, sustainable services and products to secure value for money and support well-being and mental health. As these areas are not mutually exclusive, proposals may cover more than area above.
 - ii. **Support structures and mechanisms for students with mental ill-health;** Projects may include whole institution/whole system approaches to secure effective/innovative: ways of working with internal and external services to maximise support and avoid duplication/pressure on resources; on-line services; triage services to assess and categorise student mental health-related issues and evaluate and secure appropriate interventions; mental health first aid training; joint procurement of relevant, sustainable services and products to secure value for money and support student mental health;
 - iii. **a #stepchange theme.** From involving students in our policy development, we are particularly interested in supporting the #stepchange themes of prevention; early intervention; transition; and collaborative partnership working across and between institutions and with external agencies;
 - iv. **suicide-safer approaches.** Projects may include collaborative: whole university and/or whole system approaches to suicide prevention, intervention, 'postvention' and take account of the Suicide-Safer Universities checklist.

2. HEFCW has provided funding for Learning Analytics Cymru, therefore, we do not expect to fund further learner analytics activity through this allocation.

Universities' Well-being and Health strategies 2020-21.

1. Strategies should include well-being and health, including mental health and suicide-safer approaches. We consider that #stepchange provides a framework for supporting well-being and health and mental health and aligns with the Future Generations Act's goals and ways of working. Strategies should:
 - i. take account of #stepchange and Suicide-Safer Universities frameworks or provide a strong rationale for not doing so;
 - ii. align with universities' key strategic documents, including corporate plans, strategic equality plans and fee and access plans, as well as key policies such as safeguarding;
 - iii. consider well-being and health from a whole institution and whole system perspective, including as this relates to approaches to prevention, early intervention, support, transitions and partnership working internally and externally.
 - iv. be evidence-based, identifying need and auditing existing provision, informed by data and analysis as well as considering likely future trends impacting on planning and resources;
 - v. identify priorities in collaboration with partners, including students;
 - vi. develop an implementation plan with measures and milestones which is widely-owned and led by senior managers;
 - vii. demonstrate ambition and a commit to levels of performance that will deliver improvements;
 - viii. monitor outcomes, review and revise strategies and plans regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose;
2. In addition, and in relation to suicide-safer approaches, institutions should be clear about:
 - i. their commitment to a securing a suicide-safer institution;
 - ii. approaches to strategic oversight of suicide-safer ways of working including as this relates to prevention, intervention and 'postvention', including risk assessment.
3. Where the pace of change, level of ambition or other aspect of the strategy is unclear, we will request further information.