

## Annex A

### Summary of Consultation Responses

Responses were received from eight Welsh Higher Education Institutions, one Welsh one sector body (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai) and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). A meeting convened on 14 October 2020, attended by representatives from eight Welsh Higher Education Institutions, the Open University in Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) discussed the responses.

Overall, responses welcomed the additional funding being made available and were supportive of the proposed delivery approach.

More detail on the individual question responses and outcomes agreed in the consultation meeting are set out below.

#### **Q1: Are the groups of students proposed for support (listed at point 6) appropriate? Are there any other groups of students that should be considered?**

All respondents agreed to the supporting the proposed groups of students and noted it was good to see that there is no age restriction, however there will be challenges. Four universities considered it appropriate to widen criteria and include support for those students who graduated during 2019. It was reported that graduate destination data shows that graduates do not necessarily prioritise finding a graduate-level job immediately after graduating: some spend time building a portfolio, travelling or exploring potential career paths. Thus, those who graduated in 2019 would be about to embark on applying for their graduate-level careers at the point that the country went into lockdown. One university called for a simpler eligibility criterion where any class (mode and level of study) of 2019 or 2020 graduate who is not in further study and is either unemployed, or who is not employed in a highly skilled role, would be eligible for support. This approach, alongside offering support for job hunting, would enable the support of more graduates and Welsh businesses to access the skills they need to compete and succeed.

*During the consultation meeting, all of the attendees agreed to broaden the offer to 2019 graduates, HEFCW reported that extending the offer to 2021 graduates will be dependent on further funding.*

Several institutions had concerns that the impact on all graduates who are adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated recession is not being considered and the support should be extended to include LGBTQ+, Welsh speakers, those with lower academic attainments, Forces veterans, religious minorities and the travelling community. One university felt that there is potential to add graduates who have attained degrees that lead them to employment in sectors of the economy that are struggling due to the Covid-19 outbreak e.g. aeronautical manufacturing, creative arts, hospitality and retail, all disciplines linked to learning and teaching and more importantly their employment region of North East Wales.

Two respondents sought clarification on whether the funding will be open to previous participants of the ESF funded GO Wales: AtWE programme and also clarification if the funding is able to support graduates from all levels, including postgraduate taught study.

It was suggested by one university that as the criteria is simply too narrow as a standalone, consideration could be given to a priority or a percentage to those who would have been eligible for GO Wales or meet the current proposed criteria i.e. 25% of graduates supported.

The support of graduates who have returned from other regions / universities to Wales was noted by several institutions and a request on the clarification if this is to become part of the support plan is sought. If so, consideration to be made on how will this be supported by universities across the regions.

*HEFCW reported during the consultation meeting that universities are able to work with graduates who they consider are most in need of the support to access work experience and must follow the ambitions of the ESF funded GO Wales programme. Also noted, the Delivery Plan template must contain sufficient narrative to demonstrate the funding will add value and will bring about change. Universities are able to administer the graduate programme flexibly and set their own targets to meet their individual needs to support individuals who graduated during the pandemic.*

## **Q2: Should paid placements form part of the offer?**

Several commented that if the focus of the programme is work interventions, then paid placements should form part of the offer. The likelihood that these placements will be of a short duration, especially compared with other employability programmes such as the UK's [Kickstart Scheme](#), Santander, WG's [Jobs Growth Wales](#) and Cardiff Capital Region [Graduate Scheme](#). One institution questioned the measure of success: gaining a placement or progressing into a graduate role following the placement? Acknowledged by most respondents was that the timeframe of funding is too short to demonstrate real impact.

Within the proposed timeframe, several institutions suggested a broader range of additional provision, including a series of coaching and guidance sessions delivered to graduates via group activities and webinars, as well as one-to-one support, as a more useful development. Also, the inclusion of a broader online training programme, careers coaching, careers fairs or careers education and development courses for graduates. There could be scope for collaborative activity across AGCAS Cymru Wales to deliver this, e.g. group coaching sessions. Networking and linking up with agencies such as Careers Wales would help raise the opportunity awareness of institutions' graduates.

One university noted that the proposal includes graduates who may now live outside Wales and stated that unless the work placement was online, graduates are unlikely to take up a short work placement if it requires them to move from their homes into the area. This is another reason for broadening out the supportive outcomes for this

group beyond a work placement to a broader range of supportive interventions that could be delivered remotely and therefore give greater equivalency of provision.

One university recommended a focus of the funding on developing graduates' industry knowledge through liaison with employers, supporting the further development of their critical employability skills through workshops and online learning, and helping them to consider alternative careers if required. A large development of online learning would significantly advantage graduates, and would create a long-term legacy for this funding, increasing its impact over time.

One respondent considered there may be additional interventions that may benefit graduates and businesses alongside placements. The suggestions to enable to reach and support more graduates include entrepreneurship style placements/mentorships where, graduates can develop their business with a business mentor. This provision is currently available to students via Santander funding but could be considered for graduates under this programme, helping graduates explore self-employment and help reenergise the economy.

One university suggested that the fun of digital hardware may be of greater long term benefit to students rather than paid placements.

HEFCW reported during the consultation meeting that universities will shortly be notified of additional funding to help support students affected by the Covid-19 pandemic with a particular reference to both students' wellbeing and mental health and hardship (food parcels). Refer to circular [W20/32HE](#), Covid-19: additional financial support for higher education

**Q3: If yes, should they be subsidised and at what level? Note: that funding for this would come from the HEI's allocation.**

It was suggested by most respondents that to ensure even modest take-up it will be important that fully grant funded paid placement are part of the offer. Placements should be subsidised as an incentive to support the employer, otherwise it could limit the opportunities available in SMEs.

One university reported that graduates on benefits or earning a wage in an underemployed role, are unlikely to give this up in favour of a short-term placement with no progression, even for a paid placement. In addition, one institution noted that careful consideration needs to be taken with regard to other sources of income such as Universal Credit. Unemployed graduates and those under employed on low income may not want payments for placement to impact upon their finances in a short term way.

Recommended by one respondent was a standardised approach to wages across the programme to avoid confusion and ensure parity in opportunities. Three respondents recommended that graduates should either be paid the level of the National Living Wage and two respondents suggested an hourly rate in line with other funded programmes, such as the Santander scheme (£9.30 per hour).

It was reported, by one institution that the funding should be dependent on the size of the business/number of employees. For example, SMEs should attract a greater level of subsidy than large, multi-national companies. If subsidised opportunities are part of the offer, it is suggested that the funding should be benchmarked across participating universities so that those universities with a larger proportion of funds cannot increase wage contributions to make their opportunities look more favourable.

Suggestions for the duration of the paid placement varied from 3 to 6 months to 3 to 9 months as it was proposed that placements of under 3 months won't be an attractive proposition for an employer. A longer placement would also be more meaningful.

**Q4: How can HEIs ensure that this activity complements and does not adversely affect the *GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience* programme.**

Several respondents suggested that the best approach would be to integrate/embed the graduate programme within the current GO Wales programme and operating procedures. This would ensure consistency of approach with local employers, reducing any negative competitive implications and possibly allow the allocated funds to stretch further. If previous GO Wales participants are eligible for the graduate programme, it was suggested that it may be advantageous to coordinate the delivery of both programmes by the same staff member.

One responded suggested appointing a staff member to work within the GO Wales team to work specifically with graduates, this would not adversely affect the GO Wales programme as the graduate programme provides a different offer and client group. One responded proposed that current GO Wales' teams are best placed to consult with local employers to seek their views on the support they require and can offer to graduates. Ongoing support for employers especially SME's during this time is important to aid the economy of Wales.

*During the consultation meeting, the consensus was as the activity is to enhance graduates' skills and knowledge in order to get them into work experience to help Wales recover from the Covid pandemic, then embedding delivery into the GO Wales programme may not be the preferred option.*

Most respondents reported that due to the timescale of the funding, appointing new staff to deliver this activity could be a real barrier to delivering outcomes, at least up to the first reporting period in March 2021.

*During the consultation meeting, HEFCW acknowledged the difficulties presented by the timescales, and understood that it may be necessary for HEIs to report final outcomes in a 'mop up' report towards the end of the year, to capture outcomes and outputs that may not have been achieved by the end of July 2021.*

Noted by one respondent was they anticipated the graduate support would have a negative impact on GO Wales if the outcome is solely focussed on work placements. The issue of availability of employers to host experience was a common theme, many reported that because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many employers are not in a

position to offer any kind of work experience opportunities for students or graduates, and those which are, are in high demand. To overcome this, one institution recommended more emphasis on industry knowledge, skills development, and widening horizons. Many respondents considered there is a risk that an employer possibly already sourced through GO Wales would prefer to have a graduate participating in work experience than an undergraduate. A suggestion that this could be mitigated through effective communication between the two programmes.

One respondent commented that as they are a regulated college institution, the opportunity of GO Wales is not offered to their students. To be included in the funding opportunity would be supportive to both local employers and the graduates.

**Q5: Do you agree with HEFCW's preferred funding model (option 2 with a funding floor)? Please explain.**

All respondents agreed to HEFCW's preferred funding model as this focuses funding on widening participation (WP) graduates, in line with national and institutional priorities, and it is more equitable as it recognises the proportion of WP students at each university in the funding allocations. The funding seems appropriate to HEIs, but does disadvantage graduates from other regulated institutions such as colleges was reported by one respondent.

One response recorded that Option 2 takes into consideration a more realistic number of graduates for the funding to target, rather than the whole population of graduates that includes all graduates from all backgrounds.

However, some respondents noted that there is little difference in the total amounts for either of the funding models. To give a better indication of the likely targets and numbers involved, one respondent called for an indication of the amount of funding for each graduate involved in the programme. Having a minimum threshold could be useful, but it is difficult to be definitive, as any judgement will be affected by the expected outputs.

The timescale of the in-year funding was reported as a significant issue by several respondents. The economy is very unlikely to return to anything like pre-Covid-19 level activity by April 2021, so the need for support will be there beyond this date. Subsequently, many respondents requested if there would be funding for 2021/2022. One respondent noted that there is a call for this programme and service provision to be considered longer term in order to be able to build capacity and successful outcomes.

One respondent called for more details on the payment plan and whether instalments are against defrayed outputs and another requested an indication of the amount of funding that is related to each graduate involved in the programme to understand the likely numbers involved.

Two institutions requested clarification on the evidence required for activity and expenditure, and another asked about timescales for activity.

*During the consultation meeting, HEFCW reported that there is flexibility in the funding to enable Welsh universities to deliver a package of support for their graduates to access work experience as they deem appropriate. The focus must however remain on the most disadvantaged graduates and those from groups under-represented in HE. The funding provided must provide additional support or different support to activity currently offered by the university.*

*As this programme is not ESF funded, there is no requirement to provide evidence of defrayment of expenditure, however it will be vital that the university can demonstrate via their Delivery Plan, Monitoring Report, Final Report and Case Study how the funding is going to/has added value and what change the funding has affected.*

**Q6: Are there any unintended consequences regarding the proposals in this consultation? Please explain.**

Most respondents agreed that competition between the current ESF funded GO Wales programme and the graduate programme is inevitable, the single biggest challenge in the GO Wales programme is finding credible employers to host work experience especially with the diversity of additional barriers. One noted that the graduate programme is likely to create competition between graduates and students' access to a decreasing pool of company placement opportunities. Another challenge posed by one respondent is the need to ensure that universities have the capacity to meet increased demand for support from graduates for other areas of their careers and employability service.

In one instance, it was noted that the impact of paid opportunities on a graduate's benefits needs to be carefully considered. Graduates in receipt of benefits may find that additional income affects their benefit calculations, and it is important that this is mapped and explained for graduates to understand. A challenge allied to this is that programme staff would need to understand and be able to articulate any potential effect on the benefits system. Another university highlighted the possibility that the proposed work experience options may in fact be economically disadvantageous to the groups being targeted, thereby limiting their participation

It was noted that the proposed graduate group for this programme is likely to require significant additional support in the workplace, which would not be easily available to micro SMEs. To support local SMEs to stay in business the ready supply of high calibre graduates who can actively contribute to the development of the organisation with a limited amount of supervision will be crucial.

Reported by one respondent was that as 95% of the Welsh economy is comprised of SMEs, they expect that placements will offer an excellent additional, and much needed, resource to employers. However, there are concerns that the proposed measures could be seen by employers as an unhelpful distraction at a challenging time. It is therefore recommended that work placements should form only one of a number of interventions that this funding supports.

One institution considered that this activity could be opened up to support all graduates, or that the focus is amended so that it could provide additional opportunities which are not currently covered under GO Wales i.e. supporting with key skills development, more intensive coaching support, bespoke training sessions, networking etc. Another university reported that a work experience only approach will limit the options to support graduates into sustainable highly skilled employment.

In two instances, respondents reported that graduates qualifying for this programme would be less likely to have access to appropriate IT equipment. One respondent suggested using the funding to provide hardware equipment rather than being spent on paid placements. It is vital to ensure that those involved in the programme are able to perform in the current workplace environment and that access to appropriate equipment is included.

The success of this funding was questioned by one university, if successful there will be pressure to continue the programme, if unsuccessful, questions may be posed around the launching of this programme at this particular time. Another respondent commented that if successful, there will be pressure to continue the programme. Ongoing support for employers should be a core part of the programme and the abrupt removal of support at the end of the activity must be avoided.

On a positive note, one university noted that collaboration across the Welsh HEIs could lead to shared on-line delivery of support webinars and guidance, facilitating the development of a self-support community amongst the graduates themselves as well as easing the workloads for current staff at all institutions.

**Q7: What positive or adverse effects might the proposals have on: a) opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language; and b) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?**

No adverse effects within the current GO Wales programme have been reported.

One university reported that potentially more opportunities could be available for graduates who are Welsh speakers. Conversely, one university reported that employers requiring Welsh medium employees will be restricted as a result of the proposed graduate cohort. One respondent noted that if target group is extended to all recent graduates this would be helpful in providing meaningful bilingual or Welsh-speaking work experience opportunities. However, if the target cohort remains as currently proposed, this could limit the number of Welsh speaking/bilingual opportunities as the eligibility criteria does not so readily match with the Welsh speaking population on a socioeconomic basis. One noted that opportunities to use the Welsh Language would depend on the ability of the graduate to communicate in Welsh and the ability of the employer to offer a setting where the Welsh Language is widely used. It was suggested by one respondent that this programme could request universities to ensure that a high percentage of their placement opportunities is in areas where the Welsh Language was used. Another university reported that non-Welsh speaking graduates will be disadvantaged if they are unable to converse in the Welsh language when they are surrounded by other persons conversing in Welsh around them.

- a) As per the existing programme, three respondents reported that paperwork will be available in Welsh and promotion will be bilingual. Any student wishing to be supported through the medium of Welsh, or to undertake a work experience opportunity in a Welsh language environment will be afforded the opportunity to do so. Two universities noted that they currently have Welsh language provision as part of their service and Welsh language placements can be sourced if in demand. They have made a strong commitment to developing bilingual systems where students can toggle between the English and Welsh versions. One university proposed to specifically include Welsh-speaking graduates in the programme and another proposed the proposal could increase support and contact with organisations that conduct their business in Welsh.
- b) Commitment to operating in line with the Welsh Language Act will be a matter of course. Two universities reported that project communication will be bilingual and highlight the ability to undertake placements in the Welsh language. Two respondents suggested any of the criteria for any project staff could include Welsh speaking as an essential criteria, additionally one university will promote the programme to their Welsh language networks (within and external to the University) and employers. One respondent noted that graduates from low HE Participation neighbourhood groups may have a strong cohort of Welsh speakers in their environment. This programme will allow graduates to enter the world of work with additional skills by being bilingual and empower them. Negatively graduates from Welsh areas or graduates whose English is their second language may be disadvantaged by being placed in companies where their only means of communication is English. In one response it was noted that the positive employability of Welsh language skills should be highlighted to all graduates who are either fluent or have some Welsh, including how they could build confidence to use their Welsh within the workplace. In addition, two respondents proposed that universities should seek to employ staff with Welsh language skills, wherever possible, to effectively support both graduates and employers. Any resources developed will be available bilingually.

**Q8: Could the proposals be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects on: a. opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language; and b. treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?**

Two respondents proposed the inclusion of Welsh-speaking graduates as a defined group within the programme.

If placements are to be an essential aspect of this programme, then it was suggested that virtual placements and remote/on-line opportunities must be included from the outset. If the proposal is broadened to beyond a placement only offer to include employability inventions, it would be easier to support students in either language.



One university suggested to increase the positive effects, work experience opportunities could attract a higher rate of subsidy if they will take place in businesses where Welsh is spoken, or if the student can undertake the placement in Welsh. Another option proposed by one university was the graduate programme could offer financial incentives such as a tax-free bursary to employers on top of a fully-funded placement to encourage Welsh medium placements. This could mitigate any costs taken on by the organisation to provide the placement initially e.g. translation costs. One university suggested increased to support Welsh language training for those graduates hoping to begin careers where Welsh language skills are essential.

A request by one respondent for HEFCW can set up some key links in advance to ease establishment of working relationships would be helpful.

**Q9: Do the proposals for the fund have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's seven well-being goals, Sustainable Development Principle and five ways of working?**

This proposal is aimed at mitigating the impact of a competitive recruitment market for graduates of 2020 who are socially disadvantaged or from under-represented groups to enable them to access work experience. The aim is to move them closer to the labour market and to help their transition into employment. One university reported that the proposal will have a positive impact i.e. to further promote equality for students who have barriers and justice through people empowerment with a sense of universal citizenship.

Several respondents reported that there will be a positive impact on most, if not all, of the seven well-being goals and, as is the case with all university ways of working. Some of the respondents did not however address all the WBFG Act's seven well-being goals. This proposal highlights how universities enable people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).

**Prosperous Wales:** supporting both the graduate and employer with immediate financial support, increasing the chances of longer-term financial viability. Promoting skilled workforce development in a local setting, generating opportunities within the economy, and driving sustainability. By supporting Welsh graduates the backbone of a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which despite recent health impacts is striving to generate wealth. This proposal supports the development of employment opportunities which allows people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work. Raising skills.

**Resilient Wales:** increase resilience both from an employer and graduate perspective. Retention of skills in the Welsh economy. Supporting graduates to grow and develop personally and socially. Funding option 2. facilitates a nation which maintains and enhances economic resilience and the capacity to adapt to change equally across the country.

**Healthier Wales:** 2020 has seen the need to develop a healthier Wales. Providing additional support for disabled graduates in Wales supports their physical and mental well-being at a time when widening participation graduates will benefit most from additional support benefiting future health. This goal could be linked to placements, organisations or enabling graduates with health issues to access paid work experience which will have a positive impact on their wellbeing and future employment prospects. Providing support to enable graduates to make informed choices about future employment.

**A more equal Wales:** encouraging diversity in the workforce. Supporting equal opportunities and promoting fair work, which runs throughout the principles of this proposal. One university reported that the inclusion of all groupings of graduates into the programme and also opening this up to the graduates of 2019 would have a positive effect. One university reported that the proposal includes graduates who may now live outside Wales. However, unless the work placement was online, graduates are unlikely to take up a short work placement if it requires them to move from their homes into the area. This is another reason for broadening out the supportive outcomes for this group beyond a work placement to a broader range of supportive interventions that could be delivered remotely and therefore give greater equivalency of provision. Supporting individuals from the groups identified to gain access to higher skilled employment. It was noted by one university that providing support and removing barriers for graduates with the greatest needs results in a more equal Wales.

**A Wales of cohesive communities:** Enabling individuals from the groups identified to make an employment contribution within Wales and their communities. One university reported that attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities can be supported and built through this programme. This is particularly important for some graduates to remain in their community evidenced by the Graduate Outcomes data.

**A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language:** Welsh language placements plus an increased likelihood of Welsh graduates staying in Wales. Delivery through Welsh subject to availability of staff and resources will contribute positively. One respondent noted that the proposal through careful delivery can support the usage and development of the Welsh language culture, heritage, the arts, sports and recreation. Some subjects such as arts, sports and recreation are key disciplines. Graduates and organisations in these sectors will be key to ensuring the proposal supports Welsh culture.

**A globally responsible Wales:** supporting local students and local business to impact on greater life chances and economic sustainability. Additionally, not limiting the offer to placements but also offering guidance and coaching support as a means to empower graduates to be more successful in their approach to the labour market would provide the ability to deliver to a larger number of graduates, resulting in greater impact on the future of the graduates as well as on the economy of Wales. Noted was a longitudinal analysis by the Resolution Foundation in 2019, which recorded that those who graduated during the recession years of 2008 -2011 were 1/3 more likely to be in low-paid work and to remain in such a job seven years later compared to those who left education in better economic conditions. Reacting to a

world pandemic in this way demonstrates the higher education sector's global responsibility. A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

Reviewing the five ways (long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement) of working the proposed programme would clearly support the principles around prevention, collaboration and involvement. Regional, employer and community collaboration would support the sustainable development principle and five ways of working. One university reported that the five ways are working are being met by the balancing of the short-term programme needs and with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet the long-term needs of providing graduates with further skills, confidence and experience in order to source and secure future employment for future generations.

It was noted, by one university that **collaboration** across the Welsh HEIs could lead to shared on-line delivery of support webinars and guidance, facilitating the development of a self-support community amongst the graduates themselves as well as easing the workloads for current staff at all institutions.

*During the consultation meeting, HEFCW reiterated that there is the opportunity for universities to collaborate on their delivery of activity. Attendees acknowledged that some activity could benefit from this e.g. coaching sessions, WE opportunities for graduates outside their university, group WE, Bootcamps, the sharing of employer contacts and use of AGCAS Cymru.*

*One suggestion was to set aside a percentage of the allocated funding for collaborative working. HEFCW responded that they were not keen on top-slicing the allocation for collaborative work and would leave this decision to each university to determine if they wish to set aside a percentage.*

In terms of the **sustainable development** principle, this was considered as being upheld by upskilling graduates with even further experience and empowerment in order to be engaged and improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of those involved in the programme by one respondent. One university noted that the proposal will support graduates who would otherwise suffer long-term career scarring in the most challenging recession seen in generations.

One respondent reported that **prevention** is key and will be ensured given the current climate of Covid-19. Risk assessments and Health and Safety procedures are in place to host these work experience opportunities providing a safe and comfortable environment for the Graduate to participate in the opportunity.