

Cylchlythyr | Circular

The HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: **Friday 16 November 2018**
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This document describes HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for a fee waiver under the scheme.

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



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Introduction

1. This document describes HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for a fee waiver under the scheme. Monitoring requirements remain the same as last year following amendments to the way we collect details of actual spend.

Background

2. Part-time higher education is a Welsh Government and HEFCW priority. This has been emphasised in the Welsh Government's Policy Statement on Higher Education¹ and HEFCW's Part-Time Higher Education Position Statement.² HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme offers grants to institutions that waive fees for certain part-time students who are unemployed and registered jobseekers or are in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits.
3. The part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme is designed as an instrument to help promote social justice and to assist more people to obtain higher level qualifications. As such the scheme is intended to contribute towards widening access and increasing rates of retention, progression and success.
4. Students apply directly to institutions for fee waivers and HEFCW will provide fee waiver grants to those institutions on the basis of returns they supply. This scheme does not involve direct contact between students and HEFCW.
5. In March 2013, the then Minister for Education and Skills announced changes to the part-time student support system from 2014/15 for those studying part-time higher education.³ In response, HEFCW reviewed its part-time fee waiver scheme arrangements and, following consultation, revisions were detailed in *Circular W14/28HE: The HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme*.⁴ The proposed changes to the scheme, outlined in *Circular W14/28HE*, have applied from 2014/15 onwards.
6. Professor Sir Ian Diamond recommended notable changes to the funding of part-time study in Wales in his review of higher education funding in Wales.⁵ Welsh Government in its response⁶ to the review set out that it intends to fully regulate part-time study by 2021 and is committed to further

¹ [Welsh Government Policy Statement on Higher Education](#)

² [W14/24HE: HEFCW's Part-Time Higher Education Position Statement](#)

³ [Minister for Education and Skills, Written statement – higher education part-time undergraduate support](#)

⁴ [W14/28HE: The HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme](#)

⁵ [Welsh Government Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales](#)

⁶ [Welsh Government response to the recommendations from the Review of Student Support and Higher Education Funding in Wales \('the Diamond Review'\)](#)

discussions about how study at an intensity below 25% can continue to be encouraged and funded. HEFCW will monitor these developments and keep this scheme under review on an annual basis to ensure that the scheme aligns with any future developments.

Part-time student support arrangements from 2014/15

7. In July 2014 Welsh Government introduced part-time tuition fee loans which allowed new part-time entrants from all backgrounds equality of access to higher education, providing they had not already received a qualification at the same or higher level than the qualification they were intending studying for and were studying at or above 25% full-time equivalent (FTE).⁷ The non-means tested maximum amount available through the loans system is £2,625 (75% of £3,500) per year. Any new student who wishes to study below 25% FTE will be ineligible for the loan scheme.
8. Continuing students that started their course before 1 September 2014 are not eligible for a Welsh Government part-time tuition fee loan and are required to either self-fund or apply to other funding sources. The Welsh Government's means-tested part-time fee grant remains available to continuing students that started their course before 1 September 2014 but is broadly aimed at those studying at an intensity of at least 50% FTE (courses must be completed in no more than twice the time it would take to complete the full-time equivalent).⁸ The maximum grant available is £1,025, lower than the maximum HEFCW fee waiver for students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014.

HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme

9. As described above, the introduction of the Welsh Government part-time tuition fee loans in 2014/15 has enabled all new eligible part-time students, studying at or above 25% FTE to have access to financial support for higher education. Therefore, HEFCW's part-time fee waiver scheme was amended to support those institutions providing financial support for certain groups of students not eligible for the Welsh Government's part-time tuition fee loan. There are separate criteria within the HEFCW scheme for students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 and students that commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014.
10. The following forms the basis of HEFCW's fee waiver scheme:
 - HEFCW retained its previous fee waiver scheme criteria for eligible students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014;

⁷ [Student Finance Wales, Part-time students](#)

⁸ [Student Finance Wales, Part-time students](#)

- HEFCW amended its fee waiver scheme criteria for eligible students that commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014 to apply only to those studying below 25% FTE (ie fewer than 30 credits).
11. Intensity of study will normally be measured in credit values, therefore a fee waiver grant will not be provided for any student that commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014 that studies 30 credits or more over an academic year. In the situation that a student initially undertakes fewer than 30 credits but subsequently adds to this during the academic year, institutions will be unable to claim a HEFCW fee waiver grant. However, we would encourage institutions to continue to provide that fee waiver where possible in order not to discourage students who decide they would like to study more credits.
 12. The maximum funding available to students that:
 - commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 is £1200 per annum
 - commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014 is £875 per annum.
 13. In order to provide clear guidance information is provided separately below on the position:
 - for continuing students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014; and
 - for new and continuing students that commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014.

Continuing students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014

Criteria for eligibility

14. Continuing students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 are excluded from applying for a Welsh Government part-time tuition fee loan but they might be eligible for a Welsh Government part-time fee grant.
15. The following continuing students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 are eligible for an institution to claim a fee waiver grant (if the student meets the course and personal eligibility criteria):
 - a student that is in receipt of a part-time fee grant but it is insufficient to cover the full cost of tuition fees that year⁹;
 - a student studying below 50% FTE.

⁹ Students are only eligible for up to £1200 in total combined from both schemes. For example, if their fees are £1300 and they receive the maximum fee grant of £1025, an additional £175 will be available to institutions from HEFCW's scheme. Students will need to self-finance any amount above £1200.

16. In order for an institution to claim a HEFCW fee waiver grant on behalf of a student, the institution must be satisfied that the eligibility criteria under two headings have been met:

- course
- personal

Course criteria

17. A student must:

- (i) be studying part-time and have commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014. The definition of part-time study is that used by HEFCW in its 2017/18 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) survey.¹⁰

HEFCW recognises that part-time students do not necessarily follow a course of study on a traditional academic year basis; however, for administrative simplicity the grant scheme will be based on the financial year for institutions, 1 August to 31 July.

- (ii) be registered, as a continuing student, on a programme with the aim of obtaining a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification; or on a course, module or unit which enables credit to be obtained towards a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification.

The following qualifications are recognised for the purpose of the scheme:

- First degree
- Foundation degree
- HNC
- HND
- Other undergraduate credit-bearing higher education award which is funded by HEFCW.

Students who already have any of the above qualifications and are studying for a qualification that is of the same level or lower will not be eligible for a fee waiver. Non credit-bearing courses and postgraduate courses do not qualify for the scheme.

Students are not eligible for funding to repeat a course or any modules or units within a course under any circumstances.

- (iii) be studying on a course which corresponds to ten credit values or more as defined by the Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales (CQFW) credit framework.

¹⁰ [HEFCW, Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey 2017/18](#)

Credit values will have been determined on the basis of the CQFW standard of 120 credit values equalling one academic year of higher education experience for full-time undergraduates.

Personal criteria

18. A student enrolled on an eligible course must:

- (i) be classed as eligible for funding according to the definition provided in HEFCW's HESES survey.
- (ii) be Welsh domiciled (provision of a Welsh address by the student would usually be considered sufficient evidence of Welsh domicile).
- (iii) meet **at least one** of the conditions set out under (a) to (d) below:

(a) the student's family is in receipt of:

Universal Credit
Tax Credits
Job Seekers Allowance and low-income benefits
Heating and housing benefits
Benefits for families

(b) the student is in receipt of:

Carers and disability benefits
Bereavement benefits

Information on the benefits which are listed above and the definitions of terms used in these benefits are available on the DWP website ([DWP Benefits](#)).

- (c) The student is a registered jobseeker, and has been for a continuous period of no less than six weeks prior to the date of application for fee waiver.
- (d) The sole income to the student's family is Department for Work and Pensions benefits.

For the purpose of the criterion (a) the definition of 'family' is as follows:

- married, civil partnership or unmarried couple, **or**
- married or unmarried couple or couple in a civil partnership with dependent children, **or**
- lone parent with dependent children

Evidence required

19. To be eligible under the criteria in paragraph 18 (iii) students must provide their institution with official documentary evidence of their entitlement. This, for example, may be in the form of a letter from Jobcentre Plus confirming the claimant's name, address and benefit entitlement.
20. Evidence under the criteria in paragraph 18 should be obtained prior to fees being waived. The institution should retain evidence of the documentation, for example, by recording the evidence obtained on a form, or taking a photocopy of relevant documents. HEFCW may wish to audit this evidence at a later date.

Changes in circumstances

21. A material change in circumstances may result in a student becoming, or ceasing to become, eligible for fee waiver during a period of study. Where such a case arises, the institution should seek to waive, rebate or claim fees, as appropriate, to an amount reflecting, in broad terms, the remainder of the year's period of study. Institutions should require students to notify them if such a material change in their circumstances arises.
22. A student may decide to change from a full-time to a part-time mode of study. If this change in status results in the student meeting the eligibility criteria then, where it is practical, the student should be able to benefit from the scheme. Such a case must be dealt with in the same way as any other significant change in circumstance.

Promoting fee waivers

23. We would expect institutions to promote fee waiver opportunities to those students that this policy is intended to support, particularly those from widening access backgrounds and/or those with protected characteristics. HEFCW funding is not indefinite and funding schemes are being reviewed on an annual basis. Consequently, funding for this scheme could be withdrawn prior to students achieving a full qualification, and students should be made aware of this.

General points relating to assessment of eligibility

24. Student status should normally be assessed at the beginning of a programme of study. It should then be reassessed at least once every twelve months thereafter, for the duration of the period of study.
25. Only tuition fees are eligible for fee waiver. The cost of any assessment or examination fees, additional to those included in the tuition fees, is not eligible under this scheme.

26. Higher education providers offering fee waivers under this scheme will be supported through this HEFCW grant. We encourage providers to operate and promote other schemes to support part-time students using, for example, their general resources, or other funding which can be used in support of part-time study.
27. Some cases will fall on the margins of the eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 17 and 18 above. In such cases, where the award of a fee waiver would, in the view of the institution, clearly be meeting the overall purpose of the scheme, institutions may apply reasonable discretion when testing student eligibility. It is important that the reason for applying discretion is recorded by the institution as this may be audited by HEFCW at a later date. In the event that there are more than 10 such cases within an institution, the HEFCW contact on this document should be informed without delay.

Fee waiver grant conditions

28. The following conditions of grant will apply to any payment made under the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme:
 - Institutions may claim grants only in support of waived tuition fees for those students who are deemed eligible for the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme, as set out in paragraphs 17 to 18 above. Fees may be waived to the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or a maximum of £1200 per student, whichever is the lower amount.
 - All grants paid must be used for the purposes for which they are provided.
 - Each institution must submit an annual return setting out the total value of fee waivers actually awarded.
 - HEFCW will adjust the amount of grant paid to an institution in support of student tuition fees waived where the amount that an institution has actually waived is different from its initial estimate for a year. Additional payments required where institutions have underestimated the level of funding required will be subject to the constraints of the overall HEFCW fee waiver budget.
 - Fee waiver scheme grants will not be available where institutions have waived the full tuition fee for a student where the same module(s) fees for the same academic year are being supported by a Welsh Government part-time fee grant. A fee waiver grant might be available where an institution has waived the remainder of a student's tuition fee where a Welsh Government part-time fee grant has been

insufficient to cover the full tuition fee. Details of this exception are detailed above in paragraph 15.

New students and continuing students that commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014

Criteria for eligibility

29. In order for an institution to claim for a HEFCW fee waiver grant on behalf of a student, the institution must be satisfied that the eligibility criteria under two headings have been met:
- course
 - personal

Course criteria

30. A student must:

- (i) be studying part-time at less than 25% of a full-time equivalent student and have commenced their course on or after 1 September 2014. The definition of part-time study is that used by HEFCW in its 2017/18 HESES survey.¹¹

HEFCW recognises that part-time students do not necessarily follow a course of study on a traditional academic year basis; however, for administrative simplicity the grant scheme will be based on the financial year for institutions, 1 August to 31 July.

- (ii) be registered, as a new entrant in 2018/19 or a continuing student from no earlier than 1 September 2014, on a programme with the aim of obtaining a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification; or on a course which enables credit to be obtained towards a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification.

The following qualifications are recognised for the purpose of the scheme:

- First degree
- Foundation degree
- HNC
- HND
- Other undergraduate credit-bearing higher education award which is funded by HEFCW.

Students who already have any of the above qualifications and are studying for a qualification that is of the same level or lower will not be

¹¹ [HEFCW, Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey 2017/18](#)

eligible for a fee waiver. Non-credit bearing courses and postgraduate courses do not qualify for the scheme.

Students are not eligible for funding to repeat a course or any modules or units in a course under any circumstances.

- (iii) be studying on a course which corresponds to ten credit values or more as defined by the CQFW credit framework.

Where an institution has not formally attributed CQFW credit values to elements of its programmes, notional credit values will have been determined on the basis of the CQFW standard of 120 credit values equalling one academic year of higher education experience for full-time undergraduates.

- (iv) be studying at less than 25% of a full time equivalent student. This will be measured in credit values relative to an assumed standard 120 credit year for a full-time undergraduate student and so equate to studying for less than 30 credits for the academic year of the fee waiver.

In the event that any student studies for 30 or more credits over the academic year they will cease to be eligible for the HEFCW part-time fee waiver scheme but institutions are encouraged to continue providing that fee waiver without the HEFCW grant.

Personal criteria

31. A student enrolled on an eligible course must:

- (i) be classed as eligible for funding according to the definition in HEFCW's HESES survey.
- (ii) be Welsh domiciled (provision of a Welsh address by the student would usually be considered sufficient evidence of Welsh domicile).
- (iii) meet **at least one** of the conditions set out under (a) to (d) below:

- (a) the student's family is in receipt of any one of the following:

- Universal Credit
- Tax Credits
- Job Seekers Allowance and low-income benefits
- Heating and housing benefits
- Benefits for families

- (b) the student is in receipt of any one of the following:

- Carers and disability benefits
- Bereavement benefits

Information on the benefits which are listed above and the definitions of terms used in these benefits are available on the DWP website ([DWP Benefits](#)).

- (c) The student is a registered job seeker, and has been for a continuous period of no less than six weeks prior to the date of application for fee waiver.
- (d) The sole income to the student's family is Department for Work and Pensions benefits

For the purpose of the criterion (a) the definition of 'family' is as follows:

- married, civil partnership or unmarried couple, **or**
- married or unmarried couple or couple in a civil partnership with dependent children, **or**
- lone parent with dependent children

Evidence required

- 32. To be eligible under the criteria in paragraph 31 (iii) students must provide their institution with official documentary evidence of their entitlement. This, for example, may be in the form of a letter from Jobcentre Plus confirming the claimant's name, address and benefit entitlement.
- 33. Evidence under paragraph 31 should be obtained prior to fees being waived. The institution should retain evidence of the documentation, for example, by recording the evidence obtained on a form, or taking a photocopy of relevant documents. HEFCW may wish to audit this evidence at a later date.

Changes in circumstance

- 34. A material change in circumstances may result in a student becoming, or ceasing to become, eligible for fee waiver during a period of study. Where such a case arises, the institution should seek to waive, rebate or claim fees, as appropriate, to an amount reflecting, in broad terms, the remainder of the year's period of study. Institutions should require students to notify them if such a material change in their circumstances arises.
- 35. A student that initially undertakes fewer than 30 credits but subsequently adds to this during the academic year will be ineligible for the HEFCW part time fee waiver scheme. In this case institutions are encouraged to continue providing that fee waiver without the HEFCW grant in order not to deter students from undertaking additional study.

36. A student may decide to change from a full-time to a part-time mode of study. If this change in status results in the student meeting the eligibility criteria then, where it is practical, the student should be able to benefit from the scheme. Such a case should be dealt with in the same way as any other significant change in circumstance.

Promoting fee waivers

37. We expect institutions to promote fee waiver opportunities to those students that this policy is intended to support, particularly those from widening access backgrounds and with protected characteristics. HEFCW funding is not indefinite and funding schemes are being reviewed on an annual basis. Consequently, funding for this scheme could be withdrawn prior to students achieving a full qualification and students should be made aware of this.

General points relating to assessment of eligibility

38. Student status should normally be assessed at the beginning of a programme of study. It should then be reassessed at least once every twelve months thereafter, for the duration of the period of study.
39. Only tuition fees are eligible for fee waiver. The cost of any assessment or examination fees additional to those included in the tuition fees is not eligible under this scheme.
40. Higher education providers offering fee waivers under this scheme will be supported through this HEFCW grant. Providers may, in addition operate other schemes to support part-time students using, for example, their general resources, or other funding which can be used in support of part-time study.
41. Some cases will fall on the margins of the eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 30 and 31 above. In such cases, where the award of a fee waiver would, in the view of the institution, clearly be meeting the overall purpose of the scheme, institutions may apply reasonable discretion when testing student eligibility. It is important that the reason for applying discretion is recorded by the institution as this may be audited by HEFCW at a later date. In the event that there are more than 10 such cases, HEFCW should be informed without delay.

Fee waiver grant conditions for new and continuing students starting on or after 1 September 2014

42. The following conditions of grant will apply to any payment made under the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme:

- Institutions may claim grants only in support of waived tuition fees for those students who are deemed eligible for the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme, as set out in paragraphs 31 and 32 above. Fees may be waived to the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or the maximum of £875, whichever is the lower amount.
- All grants paid must be used for the purposes for which they are provided.
- Each institution must submit an annual return setting out the total value of fee waivers actually awarded.
- HEFCW will adjust the amount of grant paid to an institution in support of student tuition fees waived where the amount that an institution has actually waived is different from its initial estimate for a year. Additional payments required where institutions have underestimated the level of funding required will be subject to the constraints of the overall HEFCW fee waiver budget.

General conditions of grant

Basis of HEFCW grant payments to institutions

43. Institutions offering fee waivers under the scheme will be supported through the HEFCW fee waiver grant subject to available funds. The maximum level of funding that that can be claimed for any student in an academic year will either be the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or the maximum amount as outlined in paragraph 12, whichever is lower.
44. Each year institutions are invited to claim a grant in support of tuition fees waived by submitting a return to HEFCW which sets out an *estimate* of the value of the tuition fees to be waived under this scheme, and an *estimate* of the number of students expected to benefit, together with the corresponding overall number of credit values. Institutions are encouraged to consider actual values of fees waived under the scheme in previous years in making their estimates.
45. The estimates of the value of fee waivers provided in the returns from institutions will be used as the basis of a payment from HEFCW to support institutions for these fees. These payments will be made in February of each year, on the basis that the evidence below is submitted, subject to checking the institution's claim.
46. In order to determine the actual value of fee waivers, we extract data returned by providers on the HESA student record and compare the *actual* value of fee waivers with the early *estimate* received the previous year to calculate the difference. Any difference between the two would be recognised in the payment of grant for the following year, subject to the constraints of the overall fee waiver budget. In the event that it had been

estimated that a student would undertake fewer than 30 credits but actually undertook 30 credits or more, a deduction would be made from the payment of grant the following year.

47. As part of their submission of the student record to HESA, institutions receive output generated by HEFCW through the Information Reporting Interface Service (IRIS). This includes a part-time fee waiver table. We require institutions to sign off the data in that table with an electronic signature. An explanation of any anomalies in the data must be provided, for example if a fee waiver is reported to have been paid to a student who is not in an eligible category, or where there are 10 or more discretionary cases within an institution.
48. Where the anomalies make a difference to the fee claimed, then this needs to be changed to reflect the actual amount of fee waiver paid out. Changes can be made to the table in red and the amended table can be signed off and returned to us, together with an explanation for the change. The downloaded table must be from the final IRIS output generated from the final signed off submission to HESA.
49. The table to be downloaded displays information about the amount of fee waived (HESA field INSTANCE.FEEWAIVEAMT) and the qualifying criterion (HESA field INSTANCE.FEEWAIVETYPE). Further information can be found on the HESA website in the student record coding manual¹². Members of staff responsible for the part-time fee waiver scheme should liaise with the HESA student record contact(s) for their institution so that they can download and scrutinise the analysis, check for consistency and look for anomalies that may need to be explained, for example, relating to changes in circumstance or discretionary fee waivers. The table also contains checks on the eligibility of the student with regards to mode and level of study, FTE and previous qualifications, and the amount of fee waiver given. A copy of the table produced through IRIS for 2017/18 is at **Annex B** as an illustrative example only. Once institutions are content with the data and any required explanations and amendments, institutions should electronically sign beneath the table and email the signed copy to us. The table should be signed by the authorised signatory for the part-time fee waiver data. The names of the authorised signatories will be collected from institutions in the autumn.
50. As a cross check, we will also analyse the HESA data when we receive final signed off HESA student record data for all institutions, after the end of November.
51. Institutions are asked to provide the electronically signed table for **2017/18** downloaded from IRIS, and an *estimate* claim for fee waiver costs in **2018/19** by completing the pro-forma at **Annex A**. A completed **Annex A** and the signed IRIS table should be returned to HEFCW by **Friday 16 November 2018**.

¹² INSTANCE.[FEEWAIVEAMT](#), [FEEWAIVETYPE](#)

Date	Action
November 2018	Institutions download the part-time fee waiver table from the final IRIS output and provide it to HEFCW with any amendments or explanations required so it shows the actual value of fee waivers for 2017/18 students. The table should be electronically signed by the authorised signatory for the part-time fee waiver data, and emailed to hestats@hefcw.ac.uk by 16 November 2018.
	Institutions provide HEFCW with an estimated value of fee waivers for 2018/19 students electronically, using the form at Annex A , sent to angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk .
December 2018	HEFCW compare the actual value of fee waivers for 2017/18 students with the estimated value of fee waivers for 2017/18 students submitted in November 2017 to establish whether there is a variance between the two figures.
February 2019*	HEFCW pay institutions based on the estimated value of fee waivers for 2018/19 students, adjusted for any variance calculated between the estimated and actual fee waivers for 2017/18 students.
*This date is subject to checking the institution's claim with the detail on HESA's student record once HEFCW have the full signed off HESA student record.	

Assessing the impact of our policies

52. As part of our policy development process we have undertaken an initial screening to consider the impact of this document on individuals with protected characteristics and groups underrepresented in higher education. This screening did not identify any negative implications nor unforeseen consequences for individuals with protected characteristics. The outcomes of this screening are available on request. We will continue to consider the impact of policies on equality and diversity, the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision, and on sustainability within the HE sector in Wales.
53. Institutions are responsible for impact assessing any part-time developments, taking into account the impact on individuals with protected characteristics in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion and/or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about equality impact assessments.

Further information

54. For technical enquiries about IRIS please email: hestats@hefcw.ac.uk, all other enquiries relating to the scheme please contact Angela West (telephone: 029 2085 9738, email: angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk).