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NEWS STORY

Communication to HEFCW on higher education admissions constraint

Letter from the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams.

First published: 10 August 2020

Last updated: 10 August 2020

David Allen
Chair
HEFCW

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In my higher education policy statement of 4 May I proposed the need for admissions constraint in the Welsh higher education sector. My proposal was set in the context of higher education admissions being a UK wide issue which required a co-ordinated approach across the four nations for the 2020/21 academic year.

I was pleased to note HEFCW's consultation on this matter. It is now necessary to reconsider the approach in Wales in light of the regulations recently approved by the UK Parliament which will give effect to the UK Government's student number controls policy. I do not believe this approach is in the best interests of Wales. I have previously stated that my chief concern is to protect the interests of Welsh students and Welsh higher education institutions. I am therefore not proposing to seek similar measures in Wales.

Emerging data from UCAS suggests that interest in entering higher education among Welsh domiciled applicants has grown since March, and a record proportion of Welsh 18 year olds are now applying to university.

However, the pattern of student demand in 2020 is expected to be volatile and very different to previous years, and we know that many institutions will be concerned about the need to fill places left vacant by any decline in international and EU recruitment. Consequently I do not wish to see an overly competitive approach to higher education recruitment within Wales which could put at risk the stability of some of our institutions.

The Welsh Government's priority is to ensure that all suitably qualified Welsh domiciled full-time undergraduate applicants are able to enter higher education in the 2020/21 academic year. I am also keen that we build on our recent success in more entering higher education through part-time study and increased progression onto post-graduate study. I want to provide opportunities in Wales for young people to progress with their education and to avoid becoming NEET, opportunities at higher education level for displaced workers to upskill and reskill, building on the HE sector's wider role in supporting learners as informed and engaged citizens.

I also want to maximise Welsh institutions' capacity to recruit new students in light of the UK Government's new restrictions on English domiciled applicants. It is therefore vital that any student number control operating in Wales does not have the unintended consequence of limiting student opportunity by creating a surplus of unfilled places.

I would therefore like HEFCW to take the steps it deems necessary to achieve stability in the Welsh sector without adversely impacting on the opportunities available to study in Wales.

I remain very appreciative of the collaborative approach we have established with the sector here in Wales, in working to identify and address the many and varied challenges the pandemic has presented.

Yours sincerely,

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education

First published

10 August 2020

Last updated

10 August 2020

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