

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Targeted Employability Support for Students: Delivery Plans and Allocations

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: 01 September 2023
Contact: Name: Emma Mock
Telephone: 029 2085 9742
Email: emma.mock@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular describes the requirements and provides the Delivery Plan template for the Targeted Employability Support Scheme for activity in academic years (AYs) 2023/24 and 2024/25. It also details the financial allocations of £2m for AY 2023/24, and includes the timetable for submission of delivery plans, payments and monitoring for both AYs.

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Introduction

1. HEFCW has made £2m available for academic year (AY) 2023/24 to enable higher education (HE) providers to continue to provide targeted employability support to students from under-represented groups and / or from lower socio-economic backgrounds, building on the activity delivered in AY 2022/23 against circular [W22/21HE](#).
2. This circular describes the requirements and provides the Delivery Plan template for the Targeted Employability Support Scheme for activity in academic years (AYs) 2023/24 and 2024/25. It also details the financial allocations for AY 2023/24, and includes the timetable for submission of delivery plans, payments and monitoring for both AYs.
3. HEFCW will be dissolved and the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) established within this AY (by April 2024). In order to provide continuity across this transition, institutions are required to submit a two-year Delivery Plan covering academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25. Delivery in AY 2024/25 will be subject to confirmation of overall future budgets from Welsh Government, as well as the transition to CTER.

Aim of the funding

4. The Targeted Employability Support Scheme enables HE providers to support the employability of HE students from groups under-represented in HE and / or from lower socio economic backgrounds. Activity must be focused on the minority of students who require additional assistance over and above that offered through core provision to the whole student body, within and outside the curriculum.
5. The support should be targeted to students furthest from the labour market to help equip them to achieve a positive outcome when they graduate. In turn, this should help them to reach their potential and achieve their goals and aspirations. Longer term, we expect the impact of this funding to be evidenced through a narrowing of the differential employment outcomes reported through the Graduate Outcomes data.

Requirements

6. HEFCW's expectations and requirements for the next two academic years remain unchanged from AY 2022/23 as detailed in Circular [W22/21HE](#). These are set out below.
7. Activity should:
 - Be targeted, aimed at developing the employability of students in widening access groups who are furthest from the labour market, and those who lack social and financial capital;

- Be flexible and student-led, tailored to the circumstances and requirements of the individual student;
- Identify barriers to engagement, so that support is targeted appropriately;
- Build the confidence of and empower the students supported to take ownership of their employability;
- Build on providers' activity to widen access to higher education, by supporting students in the target groups to maximise their opportunities for a positive employment outcome;
- Form part of a joined-up approach to developing the employability of the students which takes their well-being and other considerations into account;
- Be developed and delivered in collaboration with partners such as student support services, Students' Unions and employers;
- Ensure it takes account of the views and experiences of students;
- Ensure that no student is excluded from this support because they experience barriers to digital inclusion;
- Be preventative by identifying and supporting the students in need of this additional employability support before they leave higher education (however, refer to paragraph 13 in relation to the support extended to a limited number of graduates).

8. The funding will support individuals who are studying a higher education qualification at a provider in Wales who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds¹ or are from groups under-represented in HE, which include, but are not limited to:

- Disabled students;
- Students with a mental health condition;
- Neurodiverse students (for example, students with autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD));
- Students who are estranged from their families;
- Students who are care experienced;
- Students from Black, Asian or ethnic minority backgrounds²;
- Students with caring responsibilities, including parental responsibilities;
- Students who are refugees or asylum seekers;
- Students from an area of deprivation (i.e. the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD));
- Students from an area of low HE participation (i.e. bottom two quintiles of POLAR 4);

¹ HEFCW Council has committed to act in the spirit of the [Socio-economic Duty](#).

² HEFCW has confirmed funding to 2024/25 for universities to make more rapid and effective progress on improving race equality and tackling anti-racism in higher education, see circular [W22/25HE: Race equality in higher education and 2022/23 allocations and 2021/22 monitoring](#). In addition to supporting universities to achieve a race equality charter mark, this funding will contribute to delivering on the Welsh Government's [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#).

- Students from low income families;
 - Students who are first in their family to attend university;
 - Students who identify as LGBTQ+;
 - Students from Gypsy or Traveller backgrounds;
 - Commuter students, i.e. students who live in their family home and travel on a daily basis to their higher education provider to study.
9. Providers are required to state their priority groups in their Delivery Plans. We expect these groups to align with those identified in regulated institutions' fee and access plans. All students supported should report at least one of the characteristics identified in providers' Delivery Plans.
10. The funding should be used to support HE students of all ages, studying on a full- or part-time basis, and targeted at students furthest from the labour market who need additional employability support.
11. Institutions should set out their proposed activity using the Delivery Plan template attached as **Annex A**. Whilst institutions have flexibility to build their provision and offer to best meet the needs of their student demographic, we expect that support should consist of, at a minimum:
- mentoring;
 - a blended delivery of a range of employability activities, including entrepreneurship support;
 - signposting / supported access to each university's core employability, careers guidance, enterprise and well-being provision;
 - provision of funding for costs associated with development of employability and / or work experience to ensure finances are not a barrier to benefiting from the support;
 - work experience, of varying lengths and formats.
12. Work experience will provide students who may not have the social or financial capital with the opportunity to acquire practical experience and develop links with employers. In addition, it should help higher education providers to continue to demonstrate to employers the benefits of diversifying their workforce. We will require an estimate of the number of students who will undertake work experience in the Delivery Plan, with actual numbers reported in the Monitoring and End of Year Reports. Providers must ensure that work experience does not duplicate or displace existing provision, either that offered by themselves or through other programmes. Providers must also ensure that activity operates in line with Subsidy Control rules.
13. The focus of the funding remains preventative: it should equip students who need the additional support with the knowledge, skills, confidence and contacts to gain a positive outcome on graduation. However, we acknowledge that some students may not be in a position to engage with this support whilst studying. Furthermore, with the Graduate Support Fund II ending in July 2023, they may not be able to

access the enhanced, graduate-focused employability support that they require. Graduates should be signposted to the most appropriate support for their needs, but we will continue the flexibility of allowing providers to support a limited number of individuals who have graduated through this funding. Providers can therefore support their graduates furthest from the labour market and in need of this support, provided that:

- the proportion of graduates (i.e. individuals who have left HE at the point of contact) does not exceed 10% of the total number of individuals supported; and
 - the support provided does not extend beyond 15 months from the date of graduation. After this time they should be signposted to other provision, as necessary.
14. We will monitor the numbers of graduates supported and the timeframe of support in the Monitoring and End of Year Reports for AY 2023/24, and will then assess the impact of these restrictions.
 15. In addition to meeting statutory requirements in relation to the Welsh Language Standards, we expect providers to promote the use of Welsh through this activity. This will include, where appropriate, helping students and employers to understand the benefits of bilingualism. To this end, providers are encouraged to create bilingual work experience opportunities to meet and stimulate employer and student demand. We will require providers to report the number of opportunities provided in Welsh in the Monitoring Reports.
 16. We expect providers to review their Impact Assessments of this funding to ensure they are up-to-date. We will want to understand how any amendments to the Impact Assessments have shaped the Delivery Plans for AYs 2023/24 and 2024/25.
 17. The GO Wales brand should be retained into AY 2023/24 for external-facing activity, i.e. for engagement with employers and the cross-sector collaboration. We will work with providers during the upcoming AY to understand if there has been a benefit in retaining the brand for external-facing activity. We will then determine with the sector whether the brand and website should be retained.

Priorities for AYs 2023/24 and 2024/25

18. In addition to the above expectations, as providers move from the initial year of delivery of this activity, we require providers to strengthen their approaches in the following key areas over the next two AYs:
 - taking account of the student voice, including collaboration with students to co-create and review approaches to delivering this activity;
 - identifying and supporting franchised students, regardless of study location.
19. We will continue discussions with providers on measures and other ways to assess the impact of this funding, and will require a number of case studies

proportionate to the level of funding received to illustrate activity and impact with the End of Year Report.

20. We also require providers to continue to record which students have been supported through this funding on the HESA student record so that, longer term, we can track the impact of the funding through the Graduate Outcomes data³. The immediate deliverables of this funding will remain the number of students supported and the number of students who consider their employability has improved, reported in the Monitoring and End of Year Reports. Providers can specify additional deliverables in their Delivery Plans.
21. It is a key requirement of this funding that providers continue to build on the constructive cross sector collaborative work fostered throughout the ESF-funded GO Wales programmes and through the work of AGCAS Cymru. Such collaboration should provide economies of scale and benefits to students, employers and providers. Furthermore, should providers wish to continue to contribute a proportion of their allocation to a collaborative activity fund, we require providers collectively to inform us of its intended use, including how it aligns with the principles set out within this guidance. In addition, we expect to see the benefits of the collaboration be clearly evident over AYs 2023/24 and 2024/25.

HE in FE students

22. In line with our regulatory position, universities are responsible for making this support accessible to their franchised students. As stated in paragraph 18, we expect to see arrangements for these students strengthened in the Delivery Plans for AY 2023/24 and 2024/25. This should lead to an increase in the number of franchised students supported, as reported in the Monitoring Reports and End of Year Reports.
23. For AYs 2023/24 and 2024/25, we will continue the approach to funding the directly-funded HE in FE students that we introduced in AY 2022/23. We will therefore provide funding in line with the methodology in paragraphs 27-32 to Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and will provide a set amount of funding to Neath Port Talbot College and Gower College Swansea to enable them to continue to extend the activity delivered under the Welsh Government Employment and Enterprise Bureaus to their directly-funded HE students.

Funding allocations

24. The total budget available to support this activity for the period from 1 August 2023 until 31 July 2024 is £2m. We anticipate that the core budget for this activity will remain at the same level for AY 24/25, subject to confirmation of overall future budgets from Welsh Government and the transition to CTER.

³ To indicate a student is being supported as part of HEFCW's Targeted Employability Support funding, 021 must be entered in the student initiative identifier field [STUINITID](#) on the HESA student record. This code should be used for students who were supported at any point during the reference period.

25. Allocations for AY 2023/24 are presented in table 1. Allocations for AY 2024/25 will be confirmed in 2024. Provider allocations for AY 2024/25 will be modelled using the latest HESA data available.
26. The allocations for AY 2023/24 are confirmed in table 1:

Table 1: Confirmed allocations

Provider	Allocation (£)
Aberystwyth University	144,405
Bangor University	153,608
Cardiff Metropolitan University	235,244
Cardiff University	330,000
Open University in Wales	175,590
Swansea University	330,000
University of South Wales	330,000
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	166,693
Wrexham University	100,000
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai	25,000
Neath Port Talbot College	5,000
Gower College Swansea	5,000
Total	2,000,000

27. Allocations are calculated on a headcount of each provider's proportion of fundable widening access students, of all domiciles, and levels, who are studying at an intensity of >50%, including franchised students, on the basis that students studying at less than this intensity are more likely to be in employment.
28. Widening access students are defined as students:
- with a disability; or
 - from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic group – UK domiciled only; or
 - care leavers; or
 - from an area of deprivation (Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 quintiles 1 or 2 for all undergraduates); or
 - from an area of low HE participation – POLAR4 (participation of local areas) quintiles 1 or 2 for full-time undergraduates aged 20 or younger at the beginning of their course; ADULTHE (proportion of working age adults with HE level qualifications as measured by 2011 census) quintiles 1 or 2 for full-time undergraduates aged 21 or older at the beginning of their course and all part-time undergraduates); or
 - with parents with no HE qualifications – UK domiciled undergraduates only.
29. For universities, the funding model incorporates a floor of £100,000 to ensure minimum capacity for delivering activity. It also includes a ceiling of £330,000, which has been set based on our experience from the ESF-funded GO Wales programme of the likely maximum volume of activity an individual provider will be

able to support. In addition, it reflects that the full £2m will be used to fund this activity in AY 2023/24 (in AY 2022/23 a proportion of the budget was required for the HEFCW match funding for ESF-funded programme).

30. For Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, we have included a floor of £25,000, which takes account of the size of their directly-funded HE cohort as well as providing a minimum capacity for staffing to deliver activity. Given small numbers of directly-funded HE students at Neath Port Talbot College and Gower College Swansea, we have made a direct allocation on the basis outlined in paragraph 23.
31. The allocation was calculated on a pro rata basis and then the floor and ceiling were applied. The money deducted from providers above the funding ceiling exceeded the additional money required to bring providers up to the funding floor. In order to maintain a total funding amount of £2 million, surplus budget was redistributed across providers between the funding floor and funding ceiling on a pro rata basis.
32. Verified HESA 2021/22 data have been used to calculate the allocations.
33. Providers must use the funding to support the students in most need of the intervention, as described in their Delivery Plans, and are not bound by the parameters used for the funding methodology.

Monitoring and payment arrangements

34. On approval of a provider's Delivery Plan, HEFCW will issue funding confirmation setting out the allocated funding and the attached conditions. Payments will be made as set out in the funding confirmation and as outlined in the timetable at paragraph 40, with any changes to the profile of payments subject to agreement by HEFCW.
35. The first payment will comprise of 50% of the total allocation and will be paid to providers on approval of their Delivery Plan.
36. A Monitoring Report will be required in January 2024 with information on activity to the end of December 2023, setting out the number of students (including franchised students) and graduates supported, as well as their characteristics. In addition, we will require information on the number of those supported who consider their employability has improved at that stage, and the number who have undertaken work experience. Providers are responsible for ensuring that all the information, including required data, is included in the report so that there is a robust basis for assessing the impact of the funding and the students' outcomes. The Monitoring Report template will be provided by HEFCW.
37. The final 50% of the allocation will be paid on approval of the Monitoring Report, on condition that a provider has committed at least 75% of the first payment.
38. An End of Year Report will be required in August 2024 detailing how students have been supported, the number of students (and graduates) supported and the

impact of the funding at that stage. A number of case studies will be required, proportionate to the volume of activity funded. The case studies need to be suitable for publication. We will provide templates for the End of Year Report and Case Studies.

39. Providers will be required to confirm actual expenditure in the period 1 August 2023 – 31 July 2024 in the End of Year Report. We reserve the right to recover any budget allocation that has not been spent (i.e. paid out) by 31 July 2024. This will not affect a provider’s allocation for AY 2024/25.

Timetable

40. The timetable for the required plan, reports and payments is presented below.

Description	Date
Deadline for submission of Delivery Plan	1 September 2023
Payment of 50% of total allocation	On approval of Delivery Plan
Deadline for submission of Monitoring Report	19 January 2024
Payment of remaining 50% of total allocation, on condition that at least 75% of the first allocation has been committed	On approval of Monitoring Report
Deadline for submission of 2023/24 End of Year Report and Case Studies	23 August 2024

Further information / responses to

41. For further information, contact Emma Mock (029 2085 9742; emma.mock@hefcw.ac.uk). Providers should submit their Delivery Plans in Word format to Rachel O’Gorman, rachel.ogorman@hefcw.ac.uk, by **1 September 2023**. Universities and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai should use the template at Annex A; Neath Port Talbot College and Gower College Swansea should use the template at Annex B, recognising the different approach and level of funding provided.

Assessing the impact of our policies

42. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.