

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## Well-being and health and additional financial support for higher education students 2023/24

**Date:** 15 September 2023  
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**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales  
**Response by:** 27 September 2024  
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This circular provides information about how HEFCW will allocate £2.3m of additional funding for well-being and health, including mental health, and financial support for higher education students.

This 2023/24 funding is for universities and directly-funded colleges in Wales.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular provides information on how HEFCW will allocate an additional £2.3m in 2023/24. This funding for universities and directly-funded further education colleges is to support well-being and health, including mental health, and to provide additional financial support to higher education students.
2. Universities should read this circular in conjunction with our circular W23/24HE allocating £2m in 2023/24 to support well-being and health, including mental health, strategies, also published in August 2023.
3. For universities, monitoring related to this circular, for £2.3m, is combined with the monitoring of the £2m 2023/24 well-being and health strategy funding, to enable coherent reporting on well-being and health, including mental health.
4. Universities must align deliverables from this £2.3m funding with their existing well-being and health strategies and implementation plans.
5. For directly funded colleges a monitoring template for this £2.3m allocation is provided with this circular.

## Background and policy context

6. Both the £2.3m and £2m allocations are referenced in HEFCW's [Remit Letter 2023-24](#) from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language:  
*'Supporting student and staff health and well-being is an ongoing priority for me. I'm proud of the support our institutions have provided and the innovative approaches to supporting mental well-being in particular. I have again ringfenced £2m within HEFCW's funding allocation to ensure this crucial work continues, post-pandemic and as the cost of living crisis endures. I am pleased to be able to award an additional £2.3m, also ringfenced to support the mental health and well-being agenda across the sector'.*
7. The Welsh Government has published its response ([Welsh Government's response to the Committees report on Mental Health support in Higher Education](#)) to the recommendations in the Children and Young People's Education Committee's report on [Mental Health Support in Higher Education](#). While the remit and capacity to take forward many of these recommendations lies with the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), we are supporting underpinning activity as it relates to higher education.
8. Following initial funding through circular [W19/11HE](#), from August 2023 we are grant funding a student mental health service model feasibility study to provide additional information and assurance to HEFCW and, subsequently, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). The feasibility study specification is in provided in **Annex A**. The feasibility study will contribute to informing our response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's Mental Health Support in Higher Education report recommendation to:

*'build on the learning and evaluation from the Mental Health University Liaison Service in Cardiff and start planning for a full roll-out of this model across Wales. As part of this planning, long term funding should be committed to support full roll-out, development and maintenance of this model across Wales'.*

9. The feasibility study team, to be completed by January 2024, will work closely with, and be informed by, universities across Wales. Should further underpinning action be identified for 2023/24 following the feasibility study, we will provide additional information and guidance. We expect the study to take account of relevant well-being and health developments in further education. Lessons learned from both sectors should inform future policy and funding considerations for CTER.
10. Directly-funded colleges will receive support from the £2.3m additional award as set out in this circular, to maintain continuity with the comparable allocations made in 2022/23. Until the establishment of CTER, further education colleges will continue to receive allocations directly from the Welsh Government. We are working closely with Welsh Government to ensure that universities and colleges can benefit from each sector's learning and practice.

## **Allocations and their purpose**

### Directly-funded colleges

11. Colleges should use their allocations to review and continue support for effective activities and services delivered through a similar funding allocation provided in January 2023 (see circular [W23/01HE: Well-being and health and additional financial support for higher education students](#)). 2023/24 activities should include:
  - enhancing and promoting money advice and information services for higher education students.
  - providing financial support to students by extending hardship funding or other resources to support those experiencing financial pressures.
  - supporting potential applicants and applicants transitioning into higher education provision, as well as existing students.
  - measures to help address the cost of living increases on higher education students of all ages and those transitioning into higher education.
  - extending, enhancing or subsidising period dignity and personal hygiene products and/or clothes washing services for students.
  - working collaboratively with Students' Unions or the equivalent to ensure support provided meets the needs of students; and
  - involving students with experience of financial challenges in reviewing the support provided.

### Universities

12. Universities should use this funding to:
  - provide financial support to higher education students, by extending funding or other resources for those experiencing financial pressures, which are

impacting on their student experience, well-being, health, retention and success;

- provide resource to engage effectively with the HEFCW-funded student mental health feasibility study and any related developments in 2023/24. This will include, but is not limited to:
    - attending meetings and contributing to governance arrangements, as appropriate;
    - contributing to a mental health training needs analysis;
    - contributing to assessing the feasibility of implementing data sharing agreements in the University's region and with regional partners;
    - contributing to assessing the potential for, and value of, a shared mental health severity index;
    - responding to information and advice requests to inform the feasibility study findings, conclusions and recommendations;
    - engaging with regional health services and third sector well-being, health and mental health agencies to explore the potential for shared service models;
    - mapping the University's services and processes against the feasibility study developments to identify synergies and challenges for alignment;
    - testing models of mental health support;
  - review, and promote on websites, baseline services to support applicants' and students' well-being and health, including mental health;
  - work with unions to support the mental health and well-being of staff, including as they provide effective support to students as part of a whole-institution approach to well-being and health;
  - promote and provide accessible staff training on mental health<sup>1</sup>;
  - provide mental health training in Welsh for staff and students;
13. We do not expect all universities to be in the same position at the end of 2023/24 as we recognise that readiness to engage in a shared model or models of mental health support for students will vary by region and may be influenced by factors outside universities' control.

### **Financial support for higher education students: universities and colleges**

14. We strongly encourage universities and colleges, working with their Students' Unions or equivalent body, to build on measures to address the rapid cost of living increases impacting on well-being and health, including mental and physical health. All students, including postgraduate and international students should be considered for support, subject to need.
15. Universities and colleges must ensure that student financial support is informed by equality impact assessments.

Financial support may include:

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<sup>1</sup> This funding provides additional resource for training over and above training resources from the £2m well-being and health strategy funding 2023/24. Training funded from this allocation should be clearly identified as such on the institution's monitoring submission.

- i. increasing and/or extending the availability of, and criteria for, 'hardship' or other financial support to students most in need;
  - ii. ensuring vulnerable potential applicants and students are supported with information, advice and funding, as appropriate, including those with care-experience backgrounds, carers, those experiencing violence, domestic abuse, sexual violence, and asylum seekers and refugees;
  - iii. ensuring that potential applicants and students with protected characteristics, including those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, are aware of all financial support, information and advice available and relevant to them;
  - iv. ensuring all financial information, advice and services are available and accessible in Welsh;
  - v. involving students with experience of financial challenges in developing and reviewing financial support services;
  - vi. providing inclusive activities, resources, services and/or products at low or no-cost to support potential applicants and students experiencing financial pressures, including where this may impact on well-being, health, mental health, a sense of belonging or loneliness, the student experience, retention and success.
16. While 'one-off' support and activities may primarily benefit current students, some provision could support well-being, health and mental health provision in the longer-term. Longer-term sustainability might include providing web-based information and resources.

### **Allocation methods and expenditure timeframe**

17. Allocations for universities and colleges are provided in **Annex B**.
18. This funding will be released in one tranche in September 2023 recognising student support needs from the first term and timelines for universities contributing to the mental health feasibility study.
19. We will make this allocation to universities and colleges based on a headcount of all students taken from the HESA student record 2021/22, regardless of domicile, mode or level of study. This allocation method uses the same basis as the allocations for well-being and health strategy funding.
20. To allocate similar well-being and health and additional financial support for higher education students earlier in 2023, we wrote to Vice-Chancellors and Universities Wales in December 2022, to notify them of this funding and our intended allocation method. We received no objections to the funding methodology which we are using again for this allocation.
21. In the December 2022 [HEFCW Revised Remit Letter](#), the Welsh Government asked us to consider how the benefits of the measures extend to learners and

students across the post-16 system. Therefore, we are continuing to provide funding for directly-funded further education colleges.

22. Universities must ensure their students at partner higher education providers are included in, and benefit from, provision supported by this funding.
23. As this funding must be spent in full by 31 July 2024, our view is that the recruitment of new staff through fair and transparent processes is unlikely to meet the need to respond to the pace of delivery required by the feasibility study timelines.

### Conditions of funding

24. To account for public funding, HEFCW and/or CTER reserves the right to:
  - reclaim any funding to universities or colleges not spent in full by July 2024;
  - reclaim funding where 2023/24 monitoring submissions from universities and colleges are not satisfactory to account for the use of funding or the funding is not used for the purposes set out in this circular;
  - reclaim funding where universities fail to engage effectively with the HEFCW funded feasibility study;
  - withhold or reclaim funding where universities' and colleges' monitoring returns for 2022/23 against allocations provided through [W23/01HE: Well-being and health and additional financial support for higher education students](#) are unsatisfactory, include an underspend or where funding is not used for the purposes for which it was intended.
25. Universities that have committed to continuing to fund a student mental health regional partnership to July 2024 may use part of this funding to meet those commitments, as well as providing additional student financial support as outlined in paragraphs 14-16.
26. Universities must include all funded activities, services or resources in their 2023/24 well-being and health strategies and monitoring (see **Annex B** and **Appendix B1** of circular W23/24HE: Well-being and health, including mental health, strategy implementation plans).

### Monitoring

27. We will monitor expenditure and the use of this funding. Our monitoring may be used to inform our reporting to the Welsh Government or to share interesting practice.
28. For colleges a monitoring and case study template is attached as **Annex C**.
29. For universities we are combining the monitoring of this funding with the monitoring of the well-being and health, including mental health, strategy implementation plan funding. The universities' combined monitoring template for

both allocations is provided with the 2023/24 well-being and health, including mental health, strategy funding circular.

30. Combined monitoring is intended to ease the burden of reporting against well-being and health allocations and it recognises that the universities' implementation plans will drive the planning and use of the funding provided through this circular.

### Timetable

Actions	Date
HEFCW to allocate funding	September 2023
Universities and colleges to submit monitoring templates and case studies	27 September 2024

### Further information / responses to

31. For further information, contact [ryan.stokes@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:ryan.stokes@hefcw.ac.uk). Please submit monitoring to [amanda.phillips@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:amanda.phillips@hefcw.ac.uk).

### Assessing the impact of our policies

32. We have begun an impact assessment to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We 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](mailto:equality@hefcw.ac.uk) for more information about impact assessments. We strongly encourage higher education providers and Students' Unions to ensure ongoing equality impact assessments in utilising this allocation.
33. Our initial impact assessment findings have concluded that this allocation should make a positive contribution to increasing resources for well-being and health, including mental health and student support. The allocation aligns with existing HEFCW and provider priorities relating to well-being and health, including mental health and student support. The use of this funding could have particular positive impacts on, among other applicants and students:
  - supporting women affected by violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence, recognising that other people with these experiences may be similarly impacted;
  - supporting people from minority ethnic communities, people with disabilities, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people with a care experienced background or caring responsibilities, including applicants and students who are parents, international students and postgraduates;
  - improving and extending Welsh language information, advice, resources and support.

34. No negative impacts of this allocation have been identified at this stage. Our initial impact assessment confirms that our guidance circular with this allocation encourages collaboration and involvement of Students' Unions, students with experience of financial pressures and students with a range of backgrounds/experience, in line with the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We are encouraging integration by recommending alignment with well-being and health strategies and implementation plans and combined monitoring. We will continue to impact assess this funding including through monitoring and reporting to Welsh Government.