

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Targeted employability support for students – Confirmation of arrangements

Date: 19 July 2022
Reference: W22/21HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: 9 September 2022
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This circular summarises the outcomes of the consultation [W22/08HE: Consultation on targeted employability support for students](#), and confirms arrangements for the £1.7m fund for academic year 22/23, including the process, allocations and timetable for payments and monitoring.

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Background

1. HEFCW has made funding available for academic year 2022/23 to enable HE providers to continue to provide targeted employability support to students from under-represented groups or from lower socio-economic backgrounds, following the end of the ESF-funded [GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience](#) programme.
2. This circular summarises the outcomes of the consultation [W22/08HE: Consultation on targeted employability support for students](#), and confirms arrangements for the £1.7m fund for academic year 22/23, including the process, allocations and timetable for payments and monitoring.

Aim of the funding

3. The aim of the funding is to support the employability of students from groups under-represented in higher education or from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are least likely to have positive employment outcomes when they graduate.
4. Provider's use of the funding should aim to build upon the activities delivered through the [GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience](#) programme, and deliver employability support to 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, and help equip them to effect a positive outcome when they graduate, to help them reach their potential and achieve their goals and aspirations.

Consultation responses

6. We received 11 responses to the consultation. In addition, we held a consultation event on 6 May 2022 which provided an opportunity for interested parties to discuss the consultation and ask questions in advance of the submission of the responses.
7. A brief summary of the responses to each question, together with the outcomes, is set out below. **Annex A** provides a more detailed breakdown of the responses received, together with a list of respondents.

Approach

Q1. Do you agree with the proposed approach?

8. All respondents broadly agreed with the proposed approach, as set out in circular [W22/08HE](#), with the main points repeated at paragraphs 10 – 15 below.

Respondents welcomed the alignment of this activity with institutional strategic priorities, and the continued focus on collaboration between providers.

9. A few specific points were raised for consideration and clarification. Our responses to these are presented below.

- a. The approach set out in the circular to providing funding to directly-funded FEIs was questioned. We have taken account of this, and have revised our approach (refer to paragraphs 26 and 43).
- b. One respondent noted that they would like confirmation that work experience could be defined by the institution and that not all students supported were expected to undertake work experience. We confirm that we do not expect all students supported to undertake work experience; it is for providers to determine the activity provided to each student, based on the student's needs and circumstances. We do expect work experience to be offered to students where there would be a clear benefit (e.g. where work experience would give the student the opportunity and confidence to try a role, or if the student is not undertaking work experience as part of their course). It is also for providers to define work experience, although we would expect this activity to align with the aims referred to in paragraph 15.
- c. One respondent sought clarification on the extent to which international students could receive support. It is a decision for each provider which students are in need of this additional support, provided that the funding is used to support students furthest from the labour market and students in providers' priority groups. In the longer term, we would expect to see the impact of this funding reflected in a decreased gap between students in different cohorts reporting positive outcomes via the Graduate Outcomes survey.
- d. One provider requested specific consideration of support for apprentices and apprenticeship activity in this or future approaches. As this funding is aimed at students furthest from the labour market and as apprentices are employed in a role where they can apply and develop their skills, we consider that this is out of scope for funding. We expect that apprentices are supported to apply and develop their skills within their job role by their employer and providers' core careers and employability provision.
- e. There was a recommendation from one provider to include specific reference to neurodiversity within the potential list of students within scope, as these conditions are not always perceived as a disability. The list at paragraph 11 is not exhaustive and it is for providers to determine which students they will support. However, we acknowledge the point made and have included this explicitly in the list of students who could be in scope for support.

10. **Outcome:** We therefore confirm that the support 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;
- Identify barriers to engagement, so that support is targeted appropriately;
- Be flexible and student-led, tailored to the circumstances and requirements of the individual student;

- 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 digital inclusivity, i.e. that no student is excluded from this support due to digital poverty;
 - Be preventative by identifying and supporting the students in need of this additional employability support before they leave higher education (however, refer to paragraphs 18 – 22 in relation to the support extended to a limited number of graduates).
11. 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, 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)
 - 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

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

² HEFCW has indicated that higher education institutions will be expected to sign up to a Race Equality Charter by April 2022 to demonstrate commitment to supporting this group of students and staff. Circular [W22/05HE: Consultation on funding to support race equality in higher education](#) refers.

- Commuter students, i.e. students who live in their family home and travel on a daily basis to their higher education provider to study
12. Providers are required to articulate 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.
 13. The funding should be used to support students of all ages, studying on a full-time or part-time basis at all HE levels, and targeted at students furthest from the labour market who need additional employability support.
 14. Institutional activity will be specified in a Delivery Plan (template at **Annex B**). However, 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.
 15. 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. This is a key expectation, and an estimate of the number of students undertaking work experience should be included in the Delivery Plan, with actual numbers reported in the Monitoring Report.

Performance Measures

Q2: Is it appropriate to use the number of students who consider that their employability has improved as a result of the support as a measure of success? What other performance measures could be used to measure the impact of the funding?

16. All but one of the respondents agreed that this was an appropriate performance measure. A range of alternative measures were proposed, including the number of students whose confidence increases as a result of the support, the number of students progressing to paid placements or securing paid work, the number of interventions and / or appointments undertaken by the student, and students' progress as evidenced by the career registration data. A few respondents highlighted that the Graduate Outcomes data should ultimately reflect the impact of the funding in improved outcomes for students from the priority groups supported.

17. **Outcome:** We confirm that each provider will be required to report the number of students who consider that their employability has improved, and this will be considered as the key measure of success. Providers are therefore expected to utilise a tool to measure this. Providers will also be required to report on the number of students supported by demographic. As the activity offered will be determined by each provider, providers are encouraged to use a range of other measures to assess the impact of their activities at an institutional level, which should be reported in the Monitoring Report, but will not be set at a sector level at this stage.

Scope to support graduates

Q3: Do you agree with the proposal to support a ring-fenced number of individuals for a limited duration after graduation? If yes, is 10% of the total number of individuals supported appropriate, and is 15 months a suitable timeframe for graduates to access this support?

18. The majority of respondents agreed with the proposal to support a ring-fenced number of individuals for a limited duration after graduation. Some respondents highlighted that this should not duplicate support from the Graduate Support Fund, where providers deliver this to graduates. There was broad agreement that restricting this to a maximum of 10% of all individuals supported was reasonable, as only a small number should require support after graduation and it would retain the focus on students, although one respondent indicated they would prefer the flexibility to make the decision as required.
19. Just over half the respondents agreed that supporting a graduate for up to 15 months after graduation seemed a reasonable timeframe, as it aligned with the timescales of the Graduate Outcomes survey. One respondent stated that it would be beneficial to retain flexibility to extend past the 15 month timeframe if required. Another suggested that during the 15 month timeframe the graduate could be signposted to employability support in their community in readiness for the end of the support, and this could be incorporated into an individual's action plan from the outset to ensure their expectations are well managed. A few suggested the support could be offered for up to three years, to align with the other support offered to graduates.
20. There were a few requests for clarification on this question. Our responses to these are summarised below:
- The proposal to support a restricted number of graduates would enable providers to work with individuals who may need this support after graduation, who, due to their circumstances, may not have been able to engage with the support whilst they were studying. Therefore, it is not a requirement for individuals to be enrolled onto this support prior to graduating.
 - The timeframe and the restriction of no more than 10% will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Providers will be required to report the percentage of graduates they have supported in the Monitoring Report.

21. **Outcome:** Should providers wish to support individuals who have graduated who are furthest from the labour market and in need of this support, then they can do so, provided that the percentage of graduates supported does not exceed 10% of the total number of individuals supported and the individuals are supported only up to 15 months after they graduated. After this time they should be signposted to other provision. After the first year of delivery, we will assess the impact of restricting the number of graduates and the timeframe of support.
22. It is for each provider to ensure that the individual is benefiting from the most appropriate support, whether that is offered through the Graduate Support Fund, (although we anticipate limited overlap in timescales with the Graduate Support Fund as it is up to the end of July 2023, while this fund is intended to be recurrent), other activities offered by the provider, or that afforded by other organisations (e.g. Job Centre Plus). Where providers deliver the Graduate Support Fund to their graduates, they are required to ensure that there is no duplication between the Graduate Support Fund and this activity, and should only report individuals against one funding stream.

Funding allocations

Q4: Do you agree with the proposed funding model? Please suggest an alternative model if you do not agree.

23. Just over half the respondents agreed with the funding model. Of the respondents that did not agree, one highlighted that the model did not recognise achievement on the ESF-funded GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience programme. Another respondent also suggested that a portion of the funding to be divided according to performance on the ESF-funded GO Wales programme as this could help to generate maximum impact from the funding.
24. Some issues were identified by respondents in relation to the approach for funding directly-funded HE students in FE colleges, which posed additional complexities for colleges in needing to differentiate between directly-funded students and franchised students. In addition, one respondent highlighted that the proposed approach could lead to disproportionate funding for HE in FE students as some FE colleges might receive additional funding from partner HEIs, dependent on the number of franchised students at an FE college and the partner HEI's approach.
25. **Outcome:** The ESF-funded GO Wales programme has strict eligibility criteria, which have had differential impacts on providers. The funding model proposed for this new programme reflected that these restrictions have been removed, and that this funding is to support students who are furthest from the labour market and in need of the additional employability support, regardless of age or mode of study. The model is based on a provider's proportion of the total number of fundable widening access students who are studying at an intensity of >50%, as recorded on HESA and verified by providers. We therefore confirm that funding will be allocated to HEIs using this model. Allocations are confirmed at table 1 in paragraph 28.

26. We have taken into account points raised in relation to directly-funded HE in FE students, and have reconsidered our approach. Instead of each directly-funded FEI receiving an equal baseline of funding, a total pot of £75k for directly-funded FEIs will be ring-fenced and allocated in a way that encourages collaboration in developing this provision and piloting for directly-funded HE in FE students. Paragraph 43 sets out the approach for HE in FE students.
27. The total budget available to support the new activity for the period from 1 November 2022 until 31 July 2023 is confirmed at £1.7m, based on latest projections of spend on the ESF-funded programme and the match funding requirement for HEFCW. If the final expenditure levels on the ESF-funded programme are lower than profiled and as a result HEFCW's match funding commitment is reduced, then unused funding will be added to providers' allocations in accordance with the funding methodology.
28. The allocations are confirmed in table 1:

Table 1: Confirmed allocations³

Provider	Allocation (£)
Aberystwyth University	105,927
Bangor University	113,979
Cardiff Metropolitan University	168,307
Cardiff University	300,000
Open University in Wales	112,493
Swansea University	280,904
University of South Wales	300,000
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	143,390
Wrexham Glyndŵr University	100,000
Directly-funded FEIs	75,000
Total	1,700,000

GO Wales brand name

Q5: Should the GO Wales brand name be retained at a national level, for students and / or employers?

29. There was no clear consensus on whether the GO Wales brand name should be retained. A number of respondents highlighted that it might prove problematic to retain a national brand when the offer at each provider could differ. Others responded that retaining the brand for student-facing activity could deter students from participating, in fear that they are labelled as needing additional support. However, some respondents supported the notion of a national brand for the employer-facing activity and for the cross-sector collaboration. A few others suggested a rebrand would be helpful, to signal a move away from the ESF-funded programme and new activity which explicitly includes HE in FE students.

³ The methodology is explained in circular [W22/08HE: Consultation on targeted employability support for students](#).

30. **Outcome:** As there is no clear consensus on this question, we will retain the GO Wales brand for the first year of activity for external-facing activity, i.e. for engagement with employers and the cross-sector collaboration. The brand is recognised amongst employers, and maintaining a national brand could help manage employer engagement, especially in areas where there is more than one provider. In acknowledgement of the points made in the responses, we will not require the brand to be used for the student-facing activity. This should also help to integrate the activity with core provision.
31. We will provide guidance and support to providers on the use of the GO Wales brand name. After the first year, we will assess whether there has been a benefit in retaining the brand for the external-facing activity and could consider a rebranding exercise at that point.

Unintended or negative impacts

***Q6:** Are there any unintended consequences or negative impacts regarding the proposals in this consultation?*

32. A few unintended consequences and negative impacts were identified. The main negative impact, cited by four respondents, was the short-term nature of the funding. This was also identified as a challenge by other respondents in responses to other questions. It was highlighted that the short-term nature of funding could impact on the likelihood of attracting and retaining staff, does not provide sustainable support and can be problematic in relation to activity with employers.
33. **Outcome:** We acknowledge the challenges caused by short-term funding described in the responses. HEFCW considers this funding as a recurrent item, to be maintained at a similar level of overall budget into the 23/24 academic year, but this can only be confirmed once HEFCW's overall budget for 23/24 academic year has been received. It is also subject to HEFCW's transition into the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER).
34. A further negative consequence identified arises as a result of the end of the ESF-funded programme. On the programme, all institutions are able to use and populate a database of employers which was created centrally by HEFCW, as data controller for the programme. Without such a resource, there may be competition between providers.
35. **Outcome:** As HEFCW will no longer need to retain data relating to individuals or employers benefitting from this activity, it is for providers to work through how employer relationships and collaborative activity will be best managed. We expect providers to work together to find ways of alleviating any aspects of competition and to continue the positive way of working fostered over the ESF-funded programme. We require all providers to articulate in their Delivery Plans how they will collaborate with other providers across the HE sector. The retention of the GO Wales brand for employer-facing activity should support this as it provides a national identity for staff to use when contacting employers.

Welsh language

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*

36. Primarily positive impacts were identified in the responses, such as the opportunity to offer more Welsh language opportunities for employers, if required by employers. Respondents emphasised that all activity would be undertaken in line with the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy.
37. **Outcome:** We expect all providers to align activity with the ambitions in the Cymraeg 2050 strategy, and will require providers to articulate in their Delivery Plans how they will encourage and increase the use of Welsh across all aspects of delivery.

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?*

38. The responses contained a range of suggestions on how to increase positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and to ensure Welsh was treated no less favourably than English. These included using a portion of funding to create bilingual work experience opportunities, embedding the use of Welsh and bilingual activities as key employability skills, increasing the funding for providers who champion the use of Welsh in the workplace, and including students who wish to work through the medium of Welsh in the list of characteristics of students in scope for support.
39. **Outcome:** All providers are required to encourage the use of Welsh in delivering this activity. This will include responding to employer demand, and, where appropriate, encouraging employers to understand the benefit of bilingualism. Providers are encouraged to use a portion of their funding to create bilingual work experience opportunities, dependent on employer and student demand. It is a decision for providers to determine which students are in scope for support (with reference to the expectations set out in paragraphs 10 – 15), but all students supported must be in need of the additional support (i.e. considered furthest from the labour market). We will require provider to report the number of opportunities provided in Welsh in the Monitoring Reports.

Well-being of Future Generations Act and Impact Assessment

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 Generals (Wales) Act's seven well-being goals, Sustainable Development principle and five ways of working?

40. All respondents agreed that this funding would positively contribute to equality and diversity, and that the activity would align very well with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's seven well-being goals, Sustainable Development Principle and five ways of working. The only negative impact noted by a few respondents was the initial length of the funding.
41. **Outcome:** As no changes are suggested to the proposed approach, the aim of the funding and the approach should align with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The duration of the funding is referred to in paragraph 32.
42. We require each provider to undertake an Impact Assessment on their proposed activity. Although we do not require a copy of the Impact Assessment, we will want to understand how the outcomes of the Impact Assessment have shaped each provider's proposal as part of the Delivery Plan.

HE in FE

43. In line with our regulatory position, we expect HEIs to take responsibility for making this support available to their franchised students. We require HEIs to articulate how they will do this in their Delivery Plans, and expect the number of franchised students supported to be reported in the Monitoring Report.
44. As described in paragraph 26, we have reconsidered our approach to directly-funded HE in FE students and are working with the directly-funded FE colleges to take this forward. However, we confirm that we expect universities to share their expertise of delivering similar outcomes on the [GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience](#) programme with the directly-funded FEIs to help shape this provision for their directly-funded HE students.

Payments, monitoring and reporting

45. A Delivery Plan will be required from each university by **9 September 2022**. The template for the Delivery Plan is at **Annex B** and it should be submitted by email to Lisa Barry, lisa.barry@hefcw.ac.uk in Word format. We will provide an alternative Delivery Plan template to the directly-funded FE colleges for the first year of funding.
46. On approval of the 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 45, with any changes to the profile of payments subject to agreement by HEFCW.
47. The first payment will comprise of 50% of the total allocation and will be paid to providers on approval of their Delivery Plan.

48. A Monitoring Report will be required in April 2023 with information on activity to the end of March 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. 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.
49. 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.
50. An End of Year Report will be required in August 2023 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.
51. Providers are required to confirm actual expenditure in the period 1 November 2022 – 31 July 2023 in the End of Year Report. Any budget allocation that has not been spent (i.e. paid out) by 31 July 2023 will be recovered. This will not affect the provider's allocation for academic year 23/24.

Timetable

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

Description	Date
Deadline for submission of Delivery Plan	9 September 2022
Payment of 50% of total allocation	On approval of Delivery Plan
Deadline for submission of Monitoring Report	14 April 2023
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 End of Year Report and Case Studies	18 August 2023

Further information / responses to

53. For further information, contact Emma Mock (029 2085 9742; emma.mock@hefcw.ac.uk). Providers should submit their Delivery Plans to Lisa Barry, lisa.barry@hefcw.ac.uk by **9 September 2022**.

Assessing the impact of our policies

54. 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.