

Response to HEFCW consultation on Well-being and health in higher education statement

Universities Wales represents the interests of universities in Wales. Our membership encompasses the vice-chancellors of all the universities in Wales, and the Open University in Wales. Our mission is to support a university education system which transforms lives through the work Welsh universities do with the people and places of Wales and the wider world.

We write in response to your consultation *Well-being and health in higher education policy statement*. The consultation raises many pertinent matters and we recognise the importance of our advancing on them as a sector. Please find below our responses to the questions posed in the document.

1. Does the Statement clearly set out what HEFCW's policy position? If not what more could be done to be clearer?

1.1 Whilst we understand the need to underline the seriousness of the situation, the figure quoted in the introduction of the statement (that 1 in 4 students will experience suicidal feelings) is potentially portraying the sector inaccurately. The UUK Suicide Safer Universities¹ report notes on p5 that this figure is lower in universities than in the general population – and would like this made apparent in order that the messaging around universities and the sector is appropriately managed.

1.2 The introduction could usefully include more on the diversity of the range of staff and students that make up the sector in Wales. Some balance could potentially be brought to this on the grounds that higher education is a sector that has created a positive work/study atmosphere and so whilst we recognise that the figures quoted in the contextual section of the statement may accurately portray the sector, it is positive that we have the opportunity to use this information to create helpful interventions.

1.3 There is a growing recognition that students with clinically recognised levels of mental health difficulties are studying in larger numbers. This can be viewed as a positive as they are a group that have often been excluded from higher education in the past.

2. Are there any gaps or omissions in the Statement that should be addressed? Please explain what these are and how they should be addressed.

2.1 We were curious as to why the Future Generations Act is not explicitly considered in the legislative and policy context. The introduction notes it, and we recognise the contents of the well-being goals as being related, but it does not feature substantively.

2.2 In the long term and sustainable table (point 1), there is an implication that HEFCW will help institutions to fulfil their statutory duties. Obviously as autonomous bodies we are required to fulfil these regardless and feel it would be more helpful for HEFCW to indicate that the aim is to help institutions to achieve beyond their statutory duties.

2.3 In the same table (point 10), there is a mention of 'Advance HE – Equalities', clarification of whether this refers to the Advance HE Equality Unit or to another source of information would be useful.

2.4 It would be useful to explicitly hyper-link the well-being objectives so that these are readily available to

¹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/guidance-for-sector-practitioners-on-preventing-student-suicides.PDF>

the audience.

3. Should more be done to improve the Statement not already identified in the responses given to the questions above? If more should be done, please explain the improvements that might be helpful and why.

3.1 The short-term and medium-term milestones indicated within the tables on page 7 of the consultation include a commitment to invite universities to submit well-being and health strategies, but the timescales range between 2020 and 2022. Some clarity would be welcome as to what is expected from institutions and at which point.

3.2 The UUK report cited in the introduction notes that friends and family are often the first source of support. None of the principles as currently written considers the development of any materials or providing of information to those communities.

3.3 We strongly believe that in the 'Involve and Inform' section (point 3), there is room for Student Unions and other stakeholder groups such as UCAS and parents to be added.

3.4 In the 'Champion and Review' section (point 5), we believe that information could usefully be disseminated to other sector groups such as AMOSSHE or NASMA.

4 Is there any other information that it would be helpful for HEFCW to consider in developing the Statement further?

4.1 We believe that thought could be given to what are likely to be changing times for students and their study patterns. Study is likely to become more flexible and this will be particularly pertinent for students who are dealing with health conditions that are fluctuating.

5 Does the Statement have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act's sustainable development principle, seven wellbeing goals, and five ways of working?

5.1 We foresee no positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity other than the obvious ones that are drawn out by the consultation.

6 What positive or adverse effects will the proposals have on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?; and
- treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

6.1 In terms of the Welsh language, we view positively the offer for HEFCW to work with higher education providers to ensure that services and support are available in the Welsh language but would caution that careful thought will need to be given as to how this will work and remain sustainable.

7 Could the proposals be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?; and
- treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

7.1 We foresee no positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences.