

Universities Wales Response to Department for Education Consultation on Post- Qualification Admissions Reform – May 2021

Universities Wales represent 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.

Summary:

We support the UUK position on post-qualification admissions and thus this letter should be considered alongside UUK's full response to the consultation.

While we do not recognise the issue of 'low-quality courses', there is an opportunity to improve the current system for certain groups of students.

It is important in any consideration of changes to the admission system to take account of the substantial cross border flows between Wales and England. In 2019/20 HESA indicates that 35000 English domiciled students were studying in Wales with 25,000 going in the opposite direction. Therefore, any divergence between the nations in the delivery of a UK-wide system could cause substantial issues for applicants.

As indicated in the UUK response, any move to PQA should be done cautiously and ensure that the relevant underpinning infrastructure is capable of providing an enhanced service to students and other stakeholders. Failure to do this would lead to a system that would be worse than the current one, eliminating any possibility of levelling up and indeed could be counter-productive. We would also underline the concern that it is not clear in either proposed model exactly how the sector would accommodate candidate interviews and auditions, which are extremely helpful in helping applicants find the most suitable course and institutional fit for them.

We would also like to underline the importance of there being a programme of full engagement with the Welsh regulator (HEFCW), Welsh Government and Qualifications

Wales as well as the HE sector (including NUSW). A full consultation which engages people with lived experience should draw out these issues. A full equality impact assessment should accompany any potential changes.

Education in Wales is devolved, and any infrastructure supporting students would need to be embedded not only through HE but also in schools and FE and careers services. There are many benefits to having a shared admissions service which allows for students to apply across devolved nations, allows students to access clear and consistent guidance throughout the application process, and which encourages the sharing of effective practice between universities. This must be retained and any system that replaces it should ensure that access and equality are firmly embedded.

It is of utmost importance that any further development of proposals includes engagement across the devolved nations to identify and address any unintended consequences.

ENDS