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Well-being of Future Generations: A plan for wellbeing and health in higher education – **Higher Education Funding Council for Wales**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Stephen Lisle and Victoria Roberts.

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Appendix 1

Summary

Why we undertook the examination

- 1 In accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) the Auditor General for Wales is statutorily required to examine public bodies to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their wellbeing objectives; and taking steps to meet them.
- 2 The Act defines the sustainable development principle as acting in a manner 'which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.
- 3 The Auditor General must provide a report on his examinations to the National Assembly for Wales at least a year before each Assembly election. The first such report must be published by 2020, before the 2021 Assembly election.
- 4 Since 2018-19 the Auditor General has been undertaking examinations across the 44 bodies covered by the Act to inform his report to the National Assembly.
- 5 In May 2018, the Auditor General published his report, **Reflecting on Year One – How have public bodies responded to the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)**. He concluded that, public bodies support the principles of the Act and are taking steps to change how they work.
- 6 In developing our approach to undertaking the examinations during 2018-19 we engaged with a range of stakeholders and we also undertook pilot work during 2017-18. We are working closely with the Future Generations Commissioner.
- 7 As the preliminary work in year one included a consideration of how public bodies had set their wellbeing objectives, the principal focus of this work is the way in which public bodies are taking steps to meet their wellbeing objectives.
- 8 The findings in this report are based on fieldwork that we undertook during the period February to July 2019. We ran an initial workshop with staff from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) in February 2019, which explored how each of the five ways of working had been applied.
- 9 We reviewed key documents and undertook interviews with staff from HEFCW, Public Health Wales, the National Union of Students (Wales), Universities Wales, and the Healthy and Sustainable Colleges and Universities Network.
- 10 This report sets out the findings from our examination of the development of a plan for wellbeing and health in higher education, a step HEFCW is taking to meet its wellbeing objectives. The report also sets out HEFCW's response to our findings.

What we examined

- 11 It is important to note that HEFCW does not deliver higher education activities and services. Its role is as a funder, regulator and influencer of higher education in Wales. HEFCW is subject to the Act, however, higher education providers do not fall within the scope of the Act. Nevertheless, HEFCW works with the providers to deliver Welsh Government expectations and to challenge them to have regard to the legislation.
- 12 We examined the extent to which HEFCW is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the development of a plan for wellbeing and health in higher education. HEFCW was keen that we examined an area of policy development that was in its infancy because it was HEFCW's intention to use the learning from the examination to inform its policy development and implementation.
- 13 HEFCW has noted an increase in the profile of student wellbeing and mental health issues in the United Kingdom, as well as a growing agenda to support and improve mental health across all sectors and the general population.
- 14 Data included in HEFCW's 2018 Annual Equality Report highlighted a 54% increase in students declaring mental health conditions between the academic years of 2014/15 and 2016/17. After considering that report, HEFCW's Student Opportunities and Achievement Committee asked HEFCW to begin work focusing on wellbeing and health, including student mental health.
- 15 Another driver for HEFCW taking this step is that wellbeing and health in higher education are a priority for the Welsh Government. Ministerial priorities for HEFCW for 2018-19 and 2019-20 include a requirement to work with partners on various wellbeing activities, with a particular focus on mental health.
- 16 HEFCW could have chosen to focus specifically on student mental health. However, having researched existing wellbeing policies and frameworks, and having consulted with partner organisations, HEFCW chose to design a broad, holistic approach to supporting health and wellbeing of staff and students in higher education.
- 17 HEFCW's key action so far has been to draft and consult on a Policy Statement for wellbeing and health in higher education. Realising that it does not have the resources to tackle all areas at once, HEFCW convened a task and finish group to inform its work and it agreed to develop an initial, co-created action plan that focuses on student mental health. Further plans will follow.
- 18 HEFCW originally designed this step with a budget of £300,000 to support the work. Subsequently, the Welsh Government made a further £2 million available to underpin this work. This presents a significant opportunity but has also forced a rethink over the original plans, including timescales and deliverables.
- 19 The step remains at an early stage of development, which provides an opportunity for this examination to have a positive impact on the step as it progresses.
- 20 In order to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle public bodies must take account of the following 'ways of working'.

Exhibit 1: the 'five ways of working'

The table below sets out the 'five ways of working' as defined in the Welsh Government's **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: The Essentials**¹ document.

The five ways of working
Long term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
Prevention How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
Integration Considering how the public body's wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the wellbeing goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
Collaboration Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its wellbeing objectives.
Involvement The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

- 21 Our examination found that: **In developing its approach to health and wellbeing, HEFCW is showing commitment to the sustainable development principle but it recognises the need to further embed the five ways of working.**

¹ Welsh Government, **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: The Essentials, 2015**

HEFCW is committed to long-term thinking although the step is at an early stage of development and HEFCW does not yet have robust plans to deliver and monitor success in improving health and wellbeing

What we looked for

- 22 We looked for evidence of:
- a thorough understanding of current and long-term needs and the associated challenges and opportunities;
 - planning over an appropriate timescale;
 - resources allocated to ensure long-term benefits; and
 - appropriate monitoring and review.
- 23 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for the 'long term' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.²

What we found

- 24 We identified the following strengths:
- HEFCW's key action so far in this step has been to draft a Policy Statement, and to publish that statement for consultation. The Policy Statement includes a prominent ambition to 'ensure a long-term commitment to sustaining wellbeing and health'. HEFCW is committed to embedding this as a long-term policy area.
 - some partners were keen for HEFCW to focus its efforts solely on short-term deliverables but it has recognised that a longer-term strategic approach is required. HEFCW knows it cannot deliver the entire Policy Statement immediately, so it is balancing long and short-term needs by focusing on student wellbeing and mental health in the short term and then rolling out other action plans that will sit beneath the Policy Statement.
 - HEFCW deliberately took its time to engage with partners rather than rushing. HEFCW chose to do this because it recognised the need to secure the support of its partners to improve student health and wellbeing over the long term.
 - HEFCW's bid process encourages institutions to think about how initiatives will be sustained after the funding ends. HEFCW is requiring bidders to submit sustainable wellbeing and health strategies and, separately, the bids themselves are also required to demonstrate sustainability.

² See Appendix 1

- the Policy Statement says HEFCW will review the long-term outcomes of its approach and HEFCW is joint funding a project called Learner Analytics, which has potential to deliver long-term measures of wellbeing. The project aims to gather data that might provide an early warning of problems with student engagement, such as reduced attendance at lectures, which can potentially be used to identify and prevent mental health issues, and also provide a source of data on long-term trends in wellbeing.

25 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- HEFCW has explored trends in mental health to try to better understand the long-term needs. However, the data are limited, which has been a barrier to HEFCW carrying out forecasting or developing projections of how needs are likely to change in future. This also presents a barrier to monitoring the effectiveness of the actions in the long term.
- the infancy of this step means HEFCW's focus has so far been on student wellbeing and health, including mental health, and it has not yet looked at staff wellbeing and health.
- due to the step still being in its infancy, the Policy Statement is not yet supported by detailed planning. There is not yet a delivery framework, consideration of resources required, definition of what success looks like nor an approach to monitoring success. Milestones are included in the Policy Statement and HEFCW is now beginning the work of mapping out its next steps for planning and delivering the step.
- one-year funding provided to HEFCW by the Welsh Government is not conducive to long-term planning. There is a risk that a series of single-year, one-off projects will not join up to deliver desired outcomes. However, HEFCW has tried to mitigate these risks by offering single-year funding with the aim of pump-priming longer-term actions and by requiring institutions to develop and submit sustainable wellbeing strategies.

Preventing problems with health and wellbeing is central to HEFCW's approach although there is scope to do more to target the root causes of health and wellbeing issues

What we looked for

26 We looked for evidence of:

- a thorough understanding of the nature and type of problem the step could help prevent from occurring or getting worse;
- resources allocated to ensure preventative benefits will be delivered; and
- monitoring and review of how effectively the step is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse.

27 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'prevention' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.³

What we found

28 We identified the following strengths:

- HEFCW has chosen to focus upstream, with a broad, holistic approach to health and wellbeing, despite some pressure to focus narrowly on preventing student suicides.
- HEFCW is requiring organisations bidding for health and wellbeing funding to develop preventative wellbeing and health strategies from 2020.
- HEFCW has provided grant funding to Learner Analytics to create early warning data on issues with student engagement that could provide insight on the root causes of mental health issues.
- HEFCW is sharing best practices between institutions with the aim of preventing ill health and supporting wellbeing issues. Positive actions include a round table event with students, run jointly with NUS Wales, a report including case studies and a national conference.

29 We identified the following area for improvement:

- HEFCW has reviewed existing policies, frameworks and data to try to understand the type, nature and frequency of mental health issues but the data are limited. HEFCW has reviewed research into the root causes of mental health issues but there is more scope to use the information on root causes to target its actions.

HEFCW is working to embed the Act within the organisation and is seeking to work with partners, but more could be done to connect initiatives relating to student wellbeing

What we looked for

30 We looked for evidence of consideration of:

- how this step could contribute to the seven national wellbeing goals;
- how delivery of this step will impact on HEFCW's wellbeing objectives and wider priorities;
- how delivery of this step will impact on other public bodies' wellbeing objectives; and
- HEFCW embedding and integrating the Act within its everyday business.

³ See Appendix 1

31 Our examination was informed by the positive indicators for 'integration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁴

What we found

32 We identified the following strengths:

- HEFCW has translated the seven national wellbeing goals into its own wellbeing objectives. The organisation's wellbeing statement recognises that aligning HEFCW's ways of working with those in the Act will be beneficial to higher education and the wider society and economy. HEFCW is embedding the Act into normal ways of working (ie building Well-being of Future Generations issues into its Equality Impact Assessment process).
- the step is most relevant to two of the seven wellbeing goals (healthier, and more equal). And the Policy Statement has a section specific to the five ways of working.
- HEFCW is trying to ensure good connections between the step and other policy areas within HEFCW. The Policy Forum and Student Opportunities and Achievement Committee have key integration and advisory roles. The modest size of HEFCW provides an advantage in ensuring internal integration.
- HEFCW does not sit on Public Services Boards but reviews their work to explore alignment.
- HEFCW attends the Public Service Group for sponsored bodies, which has mapped partners' wellbeing objectives with a view to raising awareness of each partner's priorities.

33 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- the decision to develop HEFCW's approach to health and wellbeing has not been driven by its wellbeing objectives. The main driver appears to have been the remit letter and broader UK higher education policy developments. This is not necessarily a problem but might suggest tension between the annual remit process with the Welsh Government and HEFCW's approach to deciding its long-term aims and wellbeing objectives.
- capacity constraints have contributed to limited engagement between HEFCW, NHS bodies and councils. There is therefore a risk that the step will not be integrated with these other bodies' priorities and actions. However, we recognise HEFCW may not have the capacity to engage with all public bodies.
- there are many existing frameworks and initiatives for wellbeing in higher education so there is an inherent risk of duplication or contradiction. HEFCW has examined these things with a view to ensuring integration and alignment

⁴ See Appendix 1

with their Policy Statement. HEFCW also recognises there is scope to do more to join up the existing initiatives, and is planning to tackle this issue during the consultation on the Policy Statement.

- while there are some examples of HEFCW joining up its internal work related to the step, there may be scope for better integration across HEFCW's own functions, for example HEFCW's other policy areas may provide a route for assessing institutions' wellbeing and health actions.

HEFCW is enthusiastically driving collaboration and there are a range of practical and strategic steps it can take to build on its positive relationships with partners

What we looked for

- 34 We looked for evidence that HEFCW:
- has considered how it could work with others to deliver the step (to meet its wellbeing objectives, or assist another body to meet its wellbeing objectives);
 - is collaborating effectively to deliver the step; and
 - is monitoring and reviewing whether the collaboration is helping it or its stakeholders meet wellbeing objectives.
- 35 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'collaboration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁵

What we found

- 36 We identified the following strengths:
- HEFCW has a good history of working well with partner organisations, at all levels, and its good relationships provide a clear opportunity for successful collaboration in future.
 - HEFCW fully recognises that it needs the support of partners to deliver change given its distance from service delivery.
 - While it is early days for this step, there are encouraging signs about HEFCW's genuine intention to collaborate with a good range of partners.
 - the Policy Statement is HEFCW's own internal document but HEFCW has published the statement for consultation with its partners.
 - collaboration is a prominent, important aspect of the Policy Statement. The document lists partner organisations and aims to develop co-created actions.

⁵ See Appendix 1

37 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- HEFCW is planning to co-create an action plan for wellbeing and health, including mental health, to support the Policy Statement. Whilst this work is still in the early stages, there is a risk that it will be seen as HEFCW's document rather than a genuinely, co-created plan.
- there is scope to increase the awareness of, and work with, partners in the implementation of the Policy Statement and action plan for wellbeing and health, including mental health, although we recognise it is early days for this work.
- HEFCW has had to manage differing opinions from partners on how to tackle health and wellbeing. Clearer explanation of HEFCW's constraints and reasoning may be helpful to reassure partners that they are being listened to.
- HEFCW recognises the need to collaborate with NHS bodies and councils in relation to the step but HEFCW has limited capacity to do this.
- better use of video conferencing and better scheduling of meetings could make it practically easier for partners to collaborate with HEFCW.
- as it further develops its action plan, HEFCW has recognised that it will need to set out clearer delivery responsibilities for partner bodies.

HEFCW has involved partner organisations in designing the step and there is some scope to further involve students as it develops its plans

What we looked for

38 We looked for evidence that HEFCW has:

- identified who it needs to involve in designing and delivering the step;
- effectively involved key stakeholders in designing and delivering the step;
- used the results of involvement to shape the development and delivery of the step; and
- sought to learn lessons and improve its approach to involvement.

39 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'involvement' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁶

⁶ See Appendix 1

What we found

40 We identified the following strengths:

- joint work with the National Union of Students (Wales) on a mental health roundtable event in March 2019 has given HEFCW exposure to students' opinions on mental health issues, which appears to have directly impacted on HEFCW's planning.
- the Policy Statement sets out a list of organisations that HEFCW aims to work with and involve in the step. The statement is in draft form and has now been issued for consultation.
- HEFCW is involving a good range of stakeholders in designing and planning its actions on health and wellbeing.
- HEFCW worked hard to listen to various groups in developing its funding bid guidance.

41 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- there may be scope to expand and extend HEFCW's involvement of students in the step, particularly students with mental health or wellbeing issues, and students in 'at risk' groups. We recognise that HEFCW has explored some approaches to involving students with mental health issues but it has not yet found a successful, sensitive approach. Depending on the availability of resources, there may be scope to extend involvement to other groups such as school-age students (future students), parents and third sector providers.
- there may be scope to further involve part-time students and Open University students who have not been comprehensively represented in current involvement arrangements.

Part Two: HEFCW's response

- 42 Following the conclusion of our fieldwork we presented our findings to HEFCW at a workshop in July 2019. At this workshop HEFCW began to consider its response to our findings.
- 43 At this stage in its policy development, HEFCW has chosen to focus on the following key actions:

Exhibit 2: HEFCW's response to our findings, and key actions

Ways of working	Areas for improvement	HEFCW actions
Long term	Data and evidence	Assess data and evidence to inform needs analysis and improve monitoring and effectiveness. In time, expand the assessment of data and evidence to cover wider wellbeing in staff as well as students.
	Processes	Develop a delivery framework to support the Policy Statement, to include success measures and performance monitoring.
Prevention	Data and evidence	Assess HE-related mental health data and evidence to inform policy development so that they target the root causes of mental health issues.
Integration	Partnership	Align policies and practices regarding health and wellbeing across HEFCW and other public bodies.
	Processes	Further review existing wellbeing and health-related frameworks aligning HE policy while avoiding duplication or contradiction.
Collaboration	Partnership	Further promote and involve partners in the Policy Statement and mental health action plans, to ensure genuine co-creation, clear responsibilities and joint ownership.
Involvement	Partnership	Involve students, potential students and other interested parties with experience of wellbeing and health, including mental health, in policy developments.

Appendix 1

Positive indicators of the five ways of working

Exhibit 3: positive indicators of the five ways of working

The table below sets out 'positive indicators' for each of the five ways of working that we have identified. We have not used the indicators as a checklist. They should be viewed as indicators. They helped us to form conclusions about the extent to which a body is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its Well-being Objectives.

What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?

- There is a clear understanding of what 'long term' means in the context of the Act.
- They have designed the step to deliver the wellbeing objective/s and contribute to the their long-term vision.
- They have designed the step to deliver short or medium-term benefits, which are balanced with the impact over the long term (within the project context).
- They have designed the step based on a sophisticated understanding of current and future need and pressures, including analysis of future trends.
- Consequently, there is a comprehensive understanding of current and future risks and opportunities.
- Resources have been allocated to ensure long-term as well as short-term benefits are delivered.
- There is a focus on delivering outcomes, with milestones/progression steps identified where outcomes will be delivered over the long term.
- They are open to new ways of doing things which could help deliver benefits over the longer term.
- They value intelligence and pursue evidence-based approaches.

What would show a body is fully applying the preventative way of working?

- The body seeks to understand the root causes of problems so that negative cycles and intergenerational challenges can be tackled.
- The body sees challenges from a system-wide perspective, recognising and valuing the long-term benefits that they can deliver for people and places.
- The body allocates resources to preventative action that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and use of resources over the longer term, even where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs.
- There are decision-making and accountability arrangements that recognise the value of preventative action and accept short-term reductions in performance and resources in the pursuit of anticipated improvements in outcomes and use of resources.

What would show a body is taking an 'integrated' approach?

- Individuals at all levels understand their contribution to the delivery of the vision and wellbeing objectives.
- Individuals at all levels understand what different parts of the organisation do and proactively seek opportunities to work across organisational boundaries. This is replicated in their work with other public bodies.
- Individuals at all levels recognise the cross-organisation dependencies of achieving the ambition and objectives.
- There is an open culture where information is shared.
- There is a well-developed understanding of how the wellbeing objectives and steps to meet them impact on other public sector bodies.
- Individuals proactively work across organisational boundaries to maximise their contribution across the wellbeing goals and minimise negative impacts.
- Governance, structures and processes support this, as do behaviours.

What would show a body is collaborating effectively?

- The body is focused on place, community and outcomes rather than organisational boundaries.
- The body has a good understanding of partners' objectives and their responsibilities, which helps to drive collaborative activity.
- The body has positive and mature relationships with stakeholders, where information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- The body recognises and values the contributions that all partners can make.
- The body seeks to establish shared processes and ways of working, where appropriate.

What would show a body is involving people effectively?

- Having an understanding of who needs to be involved and why.
- Reflecting on how well the needs and challenges facing those people are currently understood.
- Working co-productively, working with stakeholders to design and deliver.
- Seeing the views of stakeholders as a vital sources of information that will help deliver better outcomes.
- Ensuring that the full diversity of stakeholders is represented and they are able to take part.
- Having mature and trusting relationships with its stakeholders where there is ongoing dialogue and information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- Ensure stakeholders understand the impact of their contribution.
- Seek feedback from key stakeholders which is used to help learn and improve.

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