



# THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES CYMDEITHAS DDYSGEDIG CYMRU

THE NATIONAL ACADEMY — CELEBRATING SCHOLARSHIP AND SERVING THE NATION  
YR ACADEMI GENEOLAETHOL — YN DATHLU YSGOLHEICTOD A GWASANAETHU'R GENEDL

## HEFCW Consultation: Developing a Higher Education Strategy for Wales *November 2016*

**Background Remit:** HEFCW were remitted by Welsh Government to '*work in partnership with providers*' to develop a '*new Strategy for Higher Education in Wales looking forward over the next decade*'. The strategy was to be '*high level*' and aligned with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Following this consultation, HEFCW will submit an '*initial draft of the Strategy to the Cabinet Secretary by the end of December 2016*'. This draft higher education strategy is for the Welsh Government and as such the '*final version will be a Welsh Government higher education strategy for Wales*'.... and where by '*the current (HEFCW) draft may be subject to further development or amendment after submission*'.

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**LSW Response:** The Society welcomes the development of a new HE strategy covering the next ten years, particularly given the broad political consensus received by the recent Diamond review and its focus on creating a sustainable funding settlement for institutions intended to allow Welsh universities to compete and be sustainable in a national and international market.

The higher education sector is one of Wales's most important enterprise, which creates tens of thousands of jobs and stimulates substantial economic activity in local communities, as well as the wider Welsh economy. In 2014, Welsh universities generated output equivalent to 4.6% of Wales's total GVA. In addition, higher education contributes to the wider enrichment of culture and civil society and is a significant driver of social mobility reducing inequality.

We consider the current draft, however, to be problematic given current policy uncertainties and what appears to be an attempt to craft a strategy in terms of the Future Generations Act for education providers not covered by the legislation. Our main responses are structured under the following headings:

**Timetable and Policy Context:** The timetable allocated to the development of a Higher Education Strategy is not adequate given the significance of the HE sector for Wales and notably uncertainties over Brexit and the upheavals it will cause in Wales, politically, economically and socially. It would be sensible to defer finalising a draft until 2017, when some of the significant downstream implications stemming from *Diamond*, *Hazelkorn*, *the English Higher Education and Research Bill* and *Brexit* discussions become clearer. This would allow Welsh Government and the university sector a better opportunity to take account of the current *known unknowns* and make provision for a more resilient higher education strategy that can address and hopefully accommodate these vagaries. Given a planned 10-year period coverage, a more realistic strategy period would be 2017-2027 not 2016-26.

**Structure:** By comparison with previous Welsh HE strategies (and those from other countries), the structure of the present draft attempts to create a new strategy in terms of goals defined by the Future Generation's Act. This is not an appropriate structure for formulating a future HE strategy intended to set out how the Welsh HE part of the UK sector should develop over the next decade. While there are many useful ideas located in the current draft, overall, the paper comes across as a document framed to show how HE activities can address each of the 7 wellbeing goals of the Future Generations Act's *rather* than as a higher education strategy cast against same.

Universities are independent and not bound by the Act and *must* focus on their core values and business in order to succeed and be sustainable in the global and highly competitive sector of the UK and beyond. National strategies for higher education do not take this form and the current draft would make a poor impression both in Wales and internationally.

In short, we believe that it would be more appropriate to develop a strategy for higher education in Wales that begins with a concise vision of what the strategy is designed to accomplish over the 10 year period. Most higher education institutions categorise their activities in terms of

- Research and scholarship
- Teaching and learning of students
- Engagement with businesses
- Engagement with community
- Operation and economic and social contribution to the region

This high level achievable vision should build on the progress of recent years and the strengths of Welsh higher education to make Wales a country recognized for academic excellence, innovation, competitive enterprise and an attractive place to live and work. The strategy should also include a brief evaluation of the previous relevant HE strategies (*Science for Wales 2012* and *Policy Statement on Higher Education (2013)*), followed by consideration of the level of resources required to achieve the stated objectives.

The Welsh Government and Universities in Wales have a unique responsibility for Welsh language and cultural matters. It is important that teaching and research through the medium of Welsh across all academic disciplines is highlighted, properly funded and developed. It is also critically important that a new strategy encourage and promote *Wales Studies* - the intellectual exploration and understanding of all things relating to Wales and its relations with the wider world by developing teaching, research and publication across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines.

To have a knowledge and awareness of what it means to live in a modern Wales; to have an affinity to Wales; and to be able to participate in Welsh society requires an understanding of Welsh history, its sciences, arts, language, culture and connecting with Wales as a place and natural heritage, all of which are critical parts of developing a sense of identity, confidence and sense of wellbeing. At present, HEIs in Wales are not required to ensure that the studies relating to Wales itself (past and present) form an integral part of their programmes of study. The inclusive term "*Wales Studies*", adopted by the Society embraces a wide range of subjects that help capture the knowledge and understanding of Wales covering both traditional areas such as history, politics, the Welsh language,

sociology & literature, but also relevant areas from the sciences, archaeology, health, education, technology, arts, music and natural environments. A successful development of *Wales Studies* has much to offer Wales, its people and in particular the delivery of the well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

**Future Generations Wales Act 2015:** The vision behind the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in Wales, by taking actions now, in accordance with the sustainable development principle to achieve the well-being goals. The sustainable development principle employed is designed to ensure that all Wales's public bodies carry out sustainable development objectives which take into account the fact that delivering for the *needs of the present* have to be met but without compromising the ability of *future generations to meet their own needs*.

The Future Generations Act as drafted mainly relates to the well-being of Wales and does not recognize that the future sustainability of most Welsh universities depends on (i) maintaining the significant cross-border flow of over 33,000 students between England and Wales that brings in £185M each year, (ii) the significant revenues secured from over 25,000 international students (4% of Welsh Exports) and (iii) the research impact associated with growing international collaboration.

While the Act is an innovative tool for long-term thinking and consensus building for the whole of Wales, casting the new HE strategy in terms of the act's provisions raises a number of concerns:

1. The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act makes little or no explicit reference to the role of HE. Other than reference to an *"innovative, productive and low carbon society" ... "which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities,"* under the first wellbeing goal (*A Prosperous Wales*), there is little if any reference to HE in the 46 National Indicators published by the Welsh Government intended to measure progress. This is surprising given that the *Wales We Want* report (representing the culmination of a year-long conversation with 7000 people from across Wales (*National Conversation*) in association with the development of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, found that Skills and Education to be the second most important single issue that the public thought critical for future generations, after climate change and considerably ahead of employment, health, housing and social care.

2. The 46 National indicators used by the Welsh Government to measure progress in relation to the Act's sustainability agenda provides a stark contrast with those employed in Scotland, where several of the 16 National Outcomes chosen to provide a more successful and prosperous Scotland relates to the role of universities in providing for education, research innovation and public service. Specifically, these include the importance of a *"better educated more skilled nation renowned for research and innovation"* and *"ensuring that "our young people are successful learners, confident individuals effective contributor and responsible citizens "*. Helping to assess these and other national indicators are 55 national indicators, many of which relate to and recognise explicitly the contribution of HE.

3. It remains appropriate that a new strategy for higher education should nevertheless recognise and take account of the provisions of the Act in a way that demonstrates how universities can usefully contribute to delivering the wider sustainability vision. With this in mind, it is important to recognise that any new HE strategy has to meet the *needs* of both the present and future generations. This will require producing a HE strategy (working with other sectors of Government) that delivers in the short term, a strong vibrant educational system with impactful world leading research, capable of demonstrating innovation competitiveness and generating inward investment. Wales is unlikely to be in a position to successfully meet the needs of *future generations* adequately, if it does not have the necessary resources and infrastructure to succeed in the short term.

In short, the focus of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act on long term sustainability of Wales and meeting the needs and challenges of future generations requires balancing with the need to resource the short term needs of HE providers. Universities as independent institutions have as their primary focus, the need to focus on their core values and business to succeed in an increasingly global and highly competitive sector. Universities need to ensure their own sustainability in order to be best placed to contribute to the wider provisions of the Act.

4. Having regard to the above, a new HE strategy should also demonstrate how HE could contribute further to the goals of sustainable development in Wales and the wider community as part of being globally responsible. This involves equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the ‘what’), the key dispositions and skills (the ‘how’) and the values (the ‘why’) that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed citizens who take action for a more sustainable future. This would be *education for sustainable development* rather than only *education about sustainable development*. The future development of programmes in higher education institutions that focus directly on sustainable development could be encouraged.

**University Autonomy and institutional Sustainability:** Although the Act, applies to public bodies such as HEFCW and Welsh Government, the priority for higher education providers such as universities, not subject to the provisions of the legislation is their own sustainability in an increasingly competitive sector. To secure the “*buy in and contributions from stakeholders*” given institutional autonomy, WG and HEFCW will need to work in partnership with HE providers to come up with and deliver a strategy that works for all partners. As highlighted in the Diamond Interim Report (section 2.1) such a partnership will require ‘*a balance to be struck between institutional autonomy and the necessary accountability in respect of public investment and the wider obligations of institutions.*’

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The Learned Society of Wales (LSW) is an independent, all-Wales, self-governing, pan-discipline educational charity that was established back in 2010. As Wales’s first National Academy of science and letters, the Learned Society of Wales, like similar societies in Ireland and Scotland, brings together the most successful and talented Fellows connected with Wales, for the shared purpose and common good of advancing and promoting excellence in all scholarly discipline across Wales