

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) report on Mental Health in Higher Education

Ensuring students stay well during their time at university is of great importance to us to help them achieve their ambitions and get the most out of their university experience.

It's crucial we create an environment where learners feel safe to disclose a mental health condition so that appropriate support and services can be put in place to support them and help them to succeed and to get the most out of their time at university.

We commend the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) for the work they have done in partnership with the sector to develop a strategic approach and embed health and well-being, including mental health and suicide-safer approaches, into their policies and practices.

Our institutions have also demonstrated a strong commitment, working with HEFCW, to improve the assistance and support available to staff and students. We've seen good progress by the HE sector, HEFCW, Universities Wales and NUS Wales, working together with leading health charities and other agencies, to make our HE environment a safer place for staff and students to work.

In light of the transition to the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, it is important that further policy development in this area begins to take a wider tertiary education sector lens where possible. We are mindful in our response to the recommendations that the capacity to do this may be limited until the Commission becomes fully operational in 2024. We are also mindful that during the passage of the Tertiary Education and Research Act, the Committee stressed the importance of ensuring that the Commission operates at an arm's-length from Welsh Government. We therefore wish to avoid committing the Commission to specific policy initiatives prior to its establishment and will give it room to consider the Committee's report itself as part of its wider strategic considerations.

We would like to thank the members of the **Children, Young People and Education (CYPE)** Committee for their report on Mental Health in Higher Education. We are particularly pleased to see the Committee's recommendations are in line with our current and future plans, with many of them already being addressed by the sector.

Detailed responses to the report's individual recommendations are set out below.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government in conjunction with HEFCW and the incoming Commission should draw together a data set that they wish to collect from higher education providers that provides accurate and timely data on the extent of mental health issues within their student body; the demographics of those reporting mental health distress; the interventions that they are putting in place; and evaluation of the interventions. In drawing up this data set, robust assurances must be provided, and safeguards put in place to ensure that if the data does indicate issues in a particular institution, it will not have a negative impact, as long as the institution can demonstrate the actions they are taking to address any issues. It must be possible to disaggregate the data to understand the different patterns and trends for different groups, and whether any particular groups face additional challenges accessing support, and the barriers. This will help inform service planning and funding allocations, both in the education and healthcare sector. The Welsh Government and HEFCW should work together to identify the most appropriate way to publicly share these findings to support a greater understanding of student need for mental health support in higher education.

Response: Accept in part.

This is a large, complex and long-term programme of work and it will be for the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to set out, consult on, and agree the data to be collected, its purposes, and how it will be used. The Commission will have statutory functions in relation to student welfare and well-being and will set out its expectations of institutions in order to discharge that duty.

This recommendation is accepted in part as follows. We accept that collecting data as described in the recommendation is valuable and should be an expectation of all institutions. We will work with HEFCW and in due course the Commission to ensure that is in place. Institutions already collect data for their own purposes, but this will be in different ways and using different systems. We do not accept that creating a database separate from that of the institutions is inherently more useful, though a reliable system-wide means of identifying the issues highlighted in the recommendation should be the goal and we will work with institutions to assess how that can be achieved.

Some data regarding student mental health is already publicly available, including from UCAS and HESA, but we accept the recommendation that the Welsh Government and HEFCW should work together to identify the most appropriate way to publicly share findings to support a greater understanding of student need for mental health support in higher education, to inform the approach of the Commission in this area in due course.

Financial Implications - To be determined by the Commission as part of its budget allocation.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, HEFCW, the incoming Commission, higher education providers and student representatives need to work together to set a base level of provision for international students, taking into account the specific needs of the different groups which make up the international student community. This may involve the development of specific peer networks for groups of international students. This base level of provision should not be too prescriptive, as each provider will need to tailor their provision to meet the specific needs of their cohort, and takes account of their own institutional circumstances, but it should ensure that there is a clear minimum of support that all international students across Wales know they can access. This framework should be clearly publicised in ways that will reach the different parts of the international student community, from pre-application right through to postgraduation.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has asked the sector to consider how they support international students and to share best practice.

HEFCW currently funds support for well-being and health in the sector, [including funding for mental health strategies](#) and suicide safer strategies with at least £2m a year (long-term funding) to support student services and all students, including international students. HEFCW has also provided additional funding for all students, including international students, including through additional [Welsh Government Covid support](#).

HEFCW works closely with the National Union of Students in Wales (NUS Wales) to enhance the voice of all students in regulation. HEFCW also liaises with students' unions to seek clarification on how the voice of all students (including international students) contributes to their work.

HEFCW plans to undertake further analysis of student data (e.g., progression, attainment etc) by domicile, and to use this information in its quality and institutional risk review processes.

Financial Implications – Costs will continue to be met from HEFCW's existing budget allocation.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that:

For students on healthcare and social care courses, the Welsh Government, HEFCW, the incoming Commission, higher education providers, placement providers and student representatives need to identify the specific challenges and barriers they face, and then develop a base level of provision for these groups of students taking into account the specific needs of the different groups across these cohorts of students. This base level of provision should not be too prescriptive, as each provider will need to tailor their provision to meet the specific needs of their cohort, the courses they deliver, the types of Mental Health Support in Higher Education placement these courses run and takes account of their own institutional circumstances, but it should ensure that there is a clear minimum of support that all

students on these courses across Wales know they can access. This framework should be clearly publicised in ways that will reach the different groups of these students from pre-application through to graduation.

Response: Accept

Health education and training commissioning is the responsibility of Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW). Student experience is one of their considerations when awarding contracts to higher education institutions, including the provision of well-being services and mental health support.

Student well-being is a key theme in the new education contracts for healthcare professionals, commissioned by HEIW, and adherence to student well-being support is part of their Performance and Quality Framework.

There are student well-being requirements embedded within the new contract, described as follows:

Student Well-being

- 1.1 It is the Education Provider's responsibility to provide a comprehensive range of professionally delivered Student Well-being Services that incorporate, when appropriate, peer support. Services must be free, impartial, non-judgemental, and confidential.
- 1.2 Education Providers will provide Student support Services that are clearly marketed to students and accessible and must include:
 - 1.2.1 Advice and guidance for Students with disabilities and mental health difficulties
 - 1.2.2 Screening and support for Students who present as neurodivergent
 - 1.2.3 Counselling, well-being advice and support with a mechanism to address Students in crisis (appointments must be offered through face-to-face delivery at the student's nearest university base or in Placement, through telephone & online appointments, drop-in services, workshops and self-help resources)
 - 1.2.4 Specialist advice; including help with student finance, debt, housing, equality, diversity, and inclusion and practicing a religion
 - 1.2.5 Careers advice, guidance, and information
 - 1.2.6 Academic and employability skills development
 - 1.2.7 Support to navigate the complaints process when raising an issue in the academic or Placement setting.

HEFCW works with institutions and HEIW to ensure that both organisations take a joined-up approach to health education provision and issues impacting on students. HEFCW is in the process of trying to establish engagement with Social Care Wales on a similar basis.

Financial Implications – There are no additional financial implications as the provision of well-being services and mental health support is included in the contract.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government commits to commissioning an independent evaluation into the impacts of the pandemic on readiness for, and transitions into higher education. This should then help identify any longer-term impacts and what good practice from the pandemic should be mainstreamed into “business as usual” and provide a clear evidence base for future interventions. The findings of this evaluation should be published and used by the Welsh Government and Commission to help inform funding decisions, guidance, and advice.

Response: Accept.

We accept the need for an evaluation of the sort described in the recommendation and that it should be used to inform policy in the way proposed. We have already commissioned work in this area and wish to see the outcomes of that work to assess whether any further work is required to meet the terms of the recommendation.

The Student Health and Well-being Survey, which takes place every two years, is a robust independent national survey, providing high quality data on the health and well-being of around 120,000 young people aged 11–16 in Wales. It is undertaken as part of the School Health Research Network (SHRN) – a collaboration led by Cardiff University in partnership with the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, and Cancer Research UK.

The next round of data collection is due to take place from September 2023. Data collected before and since the COVID-19 pandemic provide valuable insight into how young people’s physical and mental health and well-being, social relationships and engagement with school have changed over this period.

In 2020/21 learners preparing for exams and planning to progress to higher education were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In February 2021, universities in Wales were asked to work together to support these learners with the transition into higher education. The Open University and all universities in Wales have received funding from the Welsh Government for the next 3 years (2022-2025) to work collaboratively to develop University Ready so that resources are kept relevant and current to benefit existing and new cohorts of learners.

University Ready is hosted on the Open University’s OpenLearn platform and contains hundreds of unique resources including videos, podcasts, articles, short interactives, and online courses. These resources provide guidance for post-16 learners, their parents, and teachers on making the transition into higher education. The Welsh Government closely monitors progress of the project including reach and impact.

In April 2022, the Welsh Government commissioned an evaluation of the effectiveness of previously allocated COVID-19 related funding for post-16 education and training.

The evaluation will provide evidence on:

- How funding has supported the sector.

- How the post-16 recovery fund has been used in practice.
- Effective approaches to teaching and learning.
- Sector concerns.
- Collaboration across the sector.
- How the funding can support with existing and future challenges so learners can reach their full potential.

The evaluation may provide limited qualitative information on readiness for and transitions into higher education. A final report is due to be published in May 2023.

Financial Implications – The evaluation costs are met from the existing budget. Any additional funding requirements will be dependent on the outcome of the evaluation.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that:

In the short term, the Welsh Government and HEFCW should work to continue to develop the evidence base around the effectiveness of blended learning and student well-being support and facilitate sharing of good practice across the sector. This work must include the staff and student voice and experience in identifying what works effectively and what does not. HEFCW and then the Commission should continue to publish regular updates to inform evolving good practice in this space.

Response – Accept

HEFCW has monitored universities' use of blended learning through the pandemic and more recently. HEFCW is in the process of commissioning work on the higher education experience, including the use of blended and flexible learning, to understand what higher education looks like post-pandemic. This will provide the Commission with an up-to-date evidence base on which to base policy.

HEFCW has also set expectations that all universities review their student services using the UK-wide Stepchange self-assessment tool. HEFCW monitors universities' progress towards implementing their assessment recommendations.

Financial Implications – This work will continue to be supported by existing budget allocations as part of HEFCW's remit.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government in conjunction with HEFCW continue to monitor the pressures on providers to provide additional financial support to students who are facing financial hardship. In particular, close attention should be paid to the links between drop out and attainment rates and the need to access financial hardship

support. If providers are struggling to meet demand, the Welsh Government should look to provide further in-year funding to providers.

Response – Accept

We will work with and where necessary direct HEFCW, through our usual processes to take this forward. HEFCW already monitors retention and completion of higher education provision annually and will continue to do so to assess trends.

The Welsh Government is not able to provide an open-ended commitment to provide further in-year funding but has most recently allocated £2.3m of additional funding to HEFCW in January 2023 for health and well-being and financial hardship.

Financial Implications – Funding priorities will be considered as part of the budget setting processes with HEFCW and CTER.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government when drawing up any cost-of-living support measures must take into account the specific needs and challenges faced by all students, including post-graduate students. In announcing any support, they must make clear how they have addressed these challenges faced by students. In particular, the Welsh Government must consider that some students will not be able to access benefits such as Universal Credit or may not be able to access any UK benefits (such as international students) or face barriers in securing or increasing the number of hours of paid employment (such as post graduate students).

Response: Accept

We work closely with HEFCW to ensure the specific needs of students are considered and regularly impact assess the financial arrangements in place for all cohorts. Statutory student maintenance support amounts are reviewed annually according to policy established as part of the Diamond review. This has led to a 9.4% annual increase for the 23/24 academic year.

While we acknowledge the specific needs and challenges faced by some cohorts of students (such as postgraduates) we must also recognise that we may not be able to address them through student support measures. The needs of postgraduate students for example can be more complex than the student finance regime itself can fully address.

In relation to the Committee's concerns that students are not accessing everything they are entitled to, we work with the Students Loans Company to ensure effective and timely promotion of the available support, targeting specific groups where appropriate.

We also work closely with NASMA Wales (National Association of Student Money Advisors) so that they can ensure students are applying for everything they are entitled to and to direct them to Student Finance Wales hardship processes for student support where appropriate. NASMA act as the conduit between a number of support mechanisms to get funds to students which need it.

Financial Implications – Student support costs are reviewed annually and adjusted where necessary.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that:

That the Welsh Government provides us with regular information and any available data on the roll-out of the whole-system approach in pre-16 education. This information should be provided twice a year and should provide us with the information to understand the impact the roll out is having on children and young people's emotional and mental well-being, as well as the extent to which it is building resilience.

Response – Accept in part.

We have recently agreed our governance and reporting arrangements for the Whole School Approach (the education aspect of the wider NEST/NYTH whole system approach) and the first meeting of the new Oversight and Delivery Board -jointly convened by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Well-being - will take place in May. The CYPE chair has been invited to join this board. The new board will have a specific focus on ensuring implementation of our statutory whole school approach guidance published in March 2021 and the associated work which supports its implementation including establishment of CAMHS school in reach, implementation and use by schools of the statutory guidance, improving and extending school and community-based counselling, and the well-being of the school workforce.

We accept the recommendation in part as follows. We accept the recommendation to provide regular information and any available data on the roll-out of the whole-system approach in pre-16 education. We do not however believe that a twice yearly report will be most useful, and suggest that a single annual report covering the academic year is more beneficial, with the first such report (covering the academic year 2022-23) being provided in late 2023/early 2024. However, we are still content for the Chair to join the board (or indeed to attend as an observer), should the committee find this helpful.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, in conjunction with HEFCW and the new Commission should commission work looking at good practice on educational transitions from compulsory to post compulsory education across the world. This work should identify good practice which would translate to the Welsh sector, it should be published and used to inform future policy in this important area.

Response: Accept

The transitions from compulsory to post-compulsory education and through different parts of the post-compulsory education system are clearly of vital importance for the well-being and mental health of students. Our work is already informed by practice from elsewhere as well as from within Wales. HEFCW has commissioned and already published over 70 [good practice case studies on well-being and health in HE in Wales, several of which address the challenges faced during transitions between stages of education](#).

We accept that further understanding, research, and dissemination of good practice is critical to improving practice in this area. It will however be for the Commission, building on work funded by HEFCW in recent years, to decide precisely how this should be done, as part of its wider responsibilities working with providers in this policy area.

Every part of the education system is responsible for ensuring the successful progression and transition of learners, and this requires providing a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the provision of personal advice, guidance, support and impartial career planning. Working with the Commission, Careers Wales, and our post-16 providers we will ensure that all learners at 16 entering post-16 education and training have pathways that meet their personal needs, learning interests, aspirations and health and well-being.

Financial Implications – These will be part of the future budget considerations for HEFCW and CTER

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government outlines to the Committee how it will take forward the recommendation from the post-16 education sector to consider ways universities can work with local post-16 colleges / schools to support learner mental health in advance of the transition to higher education.

Response: Accept

The Committee is asked to note the response to recommendation 4 which outlines the work already underway to support learner transition and the evaluation report which is due to be published in May 2023.

The Commission will have a strategic duty to promote lifelong learning, civic mission, participation in tertiary education, equality of opportunity.

HEFCW has funded [the Reaching Wider Programme](#) since 2002/03, a Wales-wide collaborative widening access programme led by higher education providers, working with schools, colleges, and in community settings.

The Welsh Government is funding a Wales-wide Reaching Wider mentoring project with undergraduate mentors in schools and colleges offering English and Welsh support.

HEFCW has aligned the Reaching Wider Programme with the Curriculum for Wales purposes and will take account of the Welsh Government roadmap as set out in [Our](#)

[national mission | GOV.WALES](#). HEFCW has also published an all-age widening access position statement and has published its priorities.

Financial Implications – This is met from existing budget allocations and would form part of future budget planning considerations.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government provide the Committee with details of the new cross sector policy advisory group on mental health in tertiary education, including the terms of reference and membership, and how it will help inform the work of the Commission as this becomes established. An annual update on the work of the Group should be provided to the Committee.

Response: Accept

An advisory group for Mental Health in FE and HE, chaired by the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Well-being, has been established bringing together professionals across both tertiary and health sectors to ensure a more integrated approach. The terms of reference are attached at annex A.

The group's purpose is to identify and support implementation of ways which improve access to mental health services by post-16 students and ensure institutions have consistent and accessible resources to support prevention and/or early intervention.

The group has been established for six months where it will be reviewed to consider the effectiveness of the approach and whether there is a need for it to continue.

Ben Lewis, Director of Student Life at Cardiff University and an advisory board member, has been commissioned as a specialist policy advisor to deliver on three key workstreams with a deadline of October 2023.

Financial Implications – The cost of commissioning a specialist policy advisor is covered under departmental budget.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that:

That the Welsh Government and HEFCW update the Committee with details of where the additional funding for the Post 16 and Transition Project funding has been allocated. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the expenditure and any lessons learnt or good practice that will be shared across the sector should be made available to the Committee as soon as possible.

Response: Accept

HEFCW was awarded £600k to deliver a mentoring programme to benefit learners in sixth forms and further education institutions across Wales during the 2022/23 academic year.

Mentoring creates near-peer relationships where proximity between mentor and mentee allows mentees to broaden their horizons; it creates tangible links with university role models, narrowing the gap between post-16 education and higher education, easing transition, and breaking down barriers.

In November 2022, HEFCW awarded a £600k grant to the University of Bangor, as lead partner of the North and Mid Wales Reaching Wider Partnership, to work collaboratively with all the Reaching Wider Partnerships across Wales and their partners, including schools and colleges, and [Brightside Mentoring](#) to develop and deliver a pilot English and Welsh medium mentoring project.

As of 31 March 2023, 132 mentors had been recruited from across Wales including Welsh language mentors recruited with support and training from the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. This has enabled 232 mentees to access the Brightside Platform and undertake conversations with mentors.

Additional [funding of £2.3m has been allocated to HEFCW](#) this year to extend the support provided through institutions health and well-being strategies. Recognising how financial pressures and worries impact mental health, HEFCW were asked to prioritise funding on developing and promoting financial services and advice and to work collaboratively with students' unions in reviewing the support provided.

Unlike in England, since 2019 all our universities have well-being and health strategies and suicide safer strategies. HEFCW monitors these strategies to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose.

All Welsh universities have adopted the Universities UK Step change: mentally healthy universities and Suicide-Safer Universities frameworks [and HEFCW monitor their continued alignment with these frameworks.](#)

HEFCW will submit an end of project evaluation report to the Welsh Government in autumn 2023.

Financial Implications – There are currently no additional financial implications as there is provision in existing budgets.

Recommendation 13.

The committee recommends that:

That the Welsh Government ensures that the Commission prioritises the establishment of a whole system approach to mental health and well-being across the post 16 education sector. In doing this, that the Welsh Government and then the Commission keeps the Committee updated on a regular basis (at least annually) on progress in embedding this approach across the sector.

Response – Accept in part

The Welsh Ministers are required under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 to publish a Statement of Priorities setting out key expectations for the Commission and the tertiary sector. The contents of the first statement of the Welsh Government's high-level expectations of the Commission are currently under

consideration but as the committee is aware student mental health and well-being is a key ministerial priority.

We accept the recommendation in part as follows. We accept that there is a need to prioritise mental health and well-being across the post-16 sector. We do not accept that a whole system approach can necessarily be adopted for post-16 in the same way as for pre-16. There are a number of differences between the pre- and post-16 education sectors which may affect how a 'whole-system' approach may be established, including the relative autonomy of institutions, the statutory responsibilities of institutions to children and adults respectively, and the manner in which different education providers are funded. Consideration will also need to be given to how the UK-wide 'Stepchange' framework, which has been adopted by all Welsh universities, would fit alongside this.

Notwithstanding this, the cross-sector policy advisory group on mental health in tertiary education established by the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Well-being will specifically consider the ways in which a whole-system approach to mental health could work within the tertiary education sector and we will of course keep the committee updated on the development of this work.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 14.

The committee recommends that:

In developing the supporting student welfare registration condition, the Welsh Government, the Commission, and Higher Education sector collaborate to explore how institutions can support students to disclose any mental health conditions. This may reflect examples of existing practice in providing multiple opportunities through the application, induction and welcome process for students to declare an existing mental health condition.

Response – Accept in principle

As the Committee will be aware from its scrutiny of the Tertiary Education and Research Act [TER Act], the new registration condition will be developed by the Commission and the Welsh Government has no statutory role in that. The Commission is required to consult with tertiary education providers in developing it. The Welsh Government accepts the Committee's view that there is existing good practice amongst providers which can be drawn upon in doing so, as the recommendation suggests. We will carefully consider the importance of student welfare, as a key ministerial priority, in preparing the Statement of Priorities.

Financial Implications – Costs will need to be considered by the Commission as part of its budget allocation.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government ensures that the Commission prioritises the development of a common framework for mental health support across the higher education sector. The Commission must ensure it engages with all key partners, but particularly students, in developing this framework. This framework should set out a baseline but be flexible enough to enable institutions to design services that takes account of their own specific contexts and the specific needs of their students. It should also reflect and complement any wider work on mental health support in the post 16-sector more broadly.

Response: Accept

The new registration and funding conditions will require the Commission to set out clear expectations for universities and colleges regarding the effectiveness of their policies, services, and processes for supporting and promoting student and staff well-being, welfare, and safety. We anticipate that the new registration and funding conditions will cover many of the matters raised in the Committee's report, as well as building upon the Stepchange framework and the current expectations of higher education providers set out by HEFCW. Combined with the relevant issuing of guidance and best practice to providers, this work will effectively constitute a common framework for mental health support across the tertiary education sector, developed in partnership with key stakeholders. It will be for the Commission to consider those elements of the recommendation that relate to how this is developed and implemented.

Financial Implications – Costs will need to be considered by the Commission as part of budget allocations.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government in establishing the Commission's role and remit makes explicit the role the Commission must play in sharing and pro-actively disseminating best practice in mental health support across the higher education sector. In delivering on this the Commission must ensure that good practice remains up to date and reflects the most recent developments in this area

Response: Accept

We anticipate that the collection and dissemination of good practice within the sector will be a vital part of the Commission's work in delivering the new registration and funding conditions and fulfilling the Commission's wider duties as set out in Part 1 of the Act. The Commission will have a duty on it to promote equality of opportunity and student welfare. Mental health is part of the disability protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

The Welsh Ministers are required under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 to publish a Statement of Priorities setting out key expectations for the Commission and the tertiary sector. The contents of the first statement of the Welsh Government's high-level expectations of the Commission in this area is being actively considered and further information will be provided to the Committee as this work progresses.

The Commission's work will build on work HEFCW has already done in promoting good practice and sharing approaches such as the Stepchange framework and case studies listed under our response to Recommendation 9.

Financial Implications - Any costs will need to be considered by the Commission as part of its wider programme and budget allocations.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should undertake a realistic assessment of the funding levels needed to deliver effective, timely and student need driven support services. Once this is done, the Welsh Government should ensure that sufficient funding is provided to HEFCW, and through NHS budgets to support education and healthcare providers to deliver effective student mental well-being support. Sufficient funding should ensure that effective support is available to all students when needed and meets the needs of all sections of the student community.

Response: Reject

We agree with the committee on the importance of adequately funded services.

The recommendation is rejected simply for the reason that the Commission has been specifically established by the Senedd to fund tertiary education. It will be an arm's-length body with a substantial budget provided to it by Welsh Government to meet its overall strategic aims. It will be responsible for providing appropriate funding for school sixth forms, further education, adult community-based learning, apprenticeships, research and innovation, and higher education. We expect that the Commission will continually assess the appropriate funding required by institutions to provide services and will be well placed to liaise with health boards and Welsh Government to ensure that sufficient overall service levels for mental health support are maintained.

Financial Implications - Any additional costs will be met from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should move towards longer term funding for mental health support and should encourage the Commission to continue the approach taken by HEFCW in providing more longer-term funding commitments. The Welsh Government and then the Commission should make clear their intention to maintain an annual funding allocation targeted at mental health support and commit to the current levels of annual funding as a minimum for future budget rounds to enable higher education providers to plan their services more confidently in a long-term and sustainable manner.

Response: Accept in Principle

Welsh Government remit letters to HEFCW have ringfenced £2m a year for mental health and well-being and HEFCW has committed to long-term funding in this area.

We will publish a Statement of Priorities setting out key expectations for the Commission and the tertiary sector. The contents of the first statement of the Welsh Government's high-level expectations of the Commission are currently under consideration but as the committee is aware student mental health and well-being is a key ministerial priority.

The Commission is also subject to significant statutory duties to promote learner welfare and is also subject to duties under the Well-being of Future Generations Act which reflect the principles which the committee highlight in the recommendation.

Financial Implications – Any costs will need to be considered by the Commission as part of its wider programme and budget allocations.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government and the incoming Commission work with higher education institutions in a social partnership model to ensure that working conditions, including terms and conditions of employment, do not undermine staff in providing effective support to students.

Response: Accept

The Commission is under a duty to promote collaboration between tertiary education providers in Wales and relevant trade unions. The Social Partnership and Procurement Bill will also commit the Welsh Government and public bodies, including the Commission, to active engagement with their recognised trade unions or other staff representatives as genuine partners in the setting and pursuit of well-being objectives. The Commission is also required to have at least two representatives of the tertiary education and research workforce as associate members on its board. However, the Commission will not have powers to set out requirements regarding terms of conditions of employment in the higher education sector, which are agreed nationally between unions and employer representatives.

Financial Implications - None

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government works with HEFCW, the incoming Commission and the wider sector to encourage providers to provide meaningful mental health training for staff that takes account of the individual institutions' context and its student body. Such training should empower staff to provide appropriate support, including details of the support that can be provided by the institution and other local partners to enable effective signposting where appropriate. The Welsh Government should encourage all providers to ensure that such training is accessible to all staff, both academic and support staff, and to those providing services that have been

contracted out by the institution. In offering such training, providers should ensure protected time for staff to attend training.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government acknowledges that the provision of mental health training for sector staff could be an important means to improving mental health support and signposting within institutions. [HEFCW provides funding to support staff mental health training](#) and universities report to HEFCW on delivery of staff training.

We accept the recommendation that the Welsh Government should encourage providers to provide meaningful mental health training for staff that takes account of the individual institutions' context and its student body.

It will be for the Commission to consider those elements of the recommendation that relate to its own role and we anticipate it will give careful consideration to supporting staff training in discharging its duties in relation to promoting learner welfare.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government provides further funding to HEFCW and then the Commission to support the widening of mental health support to students through the Welsh language. This funding should be an on-going commitment to ensure longevity of Welsh language support.

Response: Accept

HEFCW continues to fund the [Myf.Cymru project](#), a mental health and well-being resource aimed at Welsh-speaking higher education students studying in Wales and beyond. These resources are accessible by all Welsh speaking students wherever they are studying even in England.

HEFCW has funded Welsh medium resources [Ynglŷn â Student Space](#). Student Space is safe, confidential, and free. It has been developed collaboratively with services, higher education professionals, researchers and students to complement the existing services available to students.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budget allocations.

Recommendation 22.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government works with HEFCW, the incoming Commission and the wider sector to encourage all higher education providers to deliver meaningful mental health training for students within their first year of study. This training should be delivered in a range of methods that ensures it is accessible to all students and

should be made available at a range of points throughout the first year. The Welsh Government should encourage providers to ensure all students have the opportunity to access this training.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government acknowledges that the provision of mental health training for students could be an important means to improving mental health support and signposting within institutions. Universities provide a range of mental health training for students throughout their studies, including in their first year, working with a variety of organisations.

We accept the recommendation that the Welsh Government should encourage providers to provide meaningful mental health training for students. It will be for the Commission to consider those elements of the recommendation that relate to its own role and we anticipate it will give careful consideration to student training in discharging its duties in relation to promoting learner welfare.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 23.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government starts scoping work with the NHS and higher education sector on the development of a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities across healthcare and education for student mental well-being. This must encompass agreement on thresholds, language and definitions. Once the Commission is established, they should take lead responsibility for continuing the work and ensuring it remains up to date and reflects current practice.

Response: Accept in principle

Information on Local Health Board (LHB) services, and national mental health support services are available on individual LHB websites and national websites such as NHS111. Through the ministerial boards which have been established to oversee the delivery of a whole system approach to mental health provision in education, we will explore how this information can be adapted and shared to assist education providers and students to access services. The Commission will be well positioned to develop a shared understanding of education providers' roles and responsibilities alongside this.

Financial Implications - Any additional costs will be met from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 24.

The committee recommends that:

Welsh Government in its first remit letter to the Commission asks the Commission to take the lead in establishing effective data sharing protocols between higher education providers and the NHS in relation to mental well-being.

Response: Accept in principle.

The sector and NHS providers are already exploring opportunities for greater sharing of information, data, and best practice through the Mental Health University Liaison Service pilot in Cardiff. We anticipate that the Commission will be well placed to build upon this work, in conjunction with providers, Welsh Government, and health boards, though this will need to take account of the parameters allowed by data protection legislation.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 25.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, HEFCW and the incoming Commission should build on the learning and evaluation from the Mental Health University Liaison Service in Cardiff and start planning for a full roll-out of this model across Wales. As part of this planning, long term funding should be committed to support full roll-out, development and maintenance of this model across Wales.

Response: Accept in principle

This is already underway. In order to support the Welsh Government's commitment to partnership working in this area HEFCW has provided £600k to the South-East Wales Mental Health Partnership to pilot the Mental Health University Liaison Service (MHULS) in 2019/20.

The model which has been developed is one which we and HEFCW support and would like to see used more extensively. We commissioned work on how to roll this out more widely and HEFCW has now started its planning to support the development of this model across Wales, taking account of the project evaluation outcomes and the options appraisal submitted to it. This includes exploration of the challenges and resources needed to create a Wales-wide approach that recognises differences of geography and of relationships between HE providers and health boards.

The recommendation is accepted in principle as we recognise that extending the partnership nationally would require an additional, long-term funding commitment extending beyond its period of operation and into that of the Commission.

Financial Implications – Cost implications will continue to be assessed. Further advice will need to follow in relation to how the commission would continue this work.

Recommendation 26.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government in the next iteration of the Mental Health Strategy and any accompanying action plans must ensure that the position of students is being considered, and opportunities are identified to address the strategic and policy gap in bringing together the healthcare and education providers.

Response: Accept

The next iteration of the Mental Health Strategy for Wales and accompanying guidance will consider the needs of everyone with continued focus on universal access and equity of care. A Ministerial Task and Finish Group has been established to consider mental health support in post-16 education which will be used to inform the development of the strategy alongside robust stakeholder engagement which will provide the opportunity for everyone, including students and education providers to influence the strategy.

Financial Implications - This will be considered as part of the development of the Mental Health Strategy for Wales.

Recommendation 27.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government provides annual updates or where there are significant developments to the Committee on the performance of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board as it relates to mental health support to children, young people and any higher education students within the Health Board area.

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government provides regular updates on the performance of all health boards in Wales against targets specified in the Mental Health Measure and as part of the development of the core mental health dataset we will be expanding this available information.

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has been escalated to special measures in February 2023 following serious concerns around leadership, culture and governance amongst others. These are serious issues that are prevalent across the organisation including those areas responsible for mental health support to children, young people and higher education students. The Special Measures escalation results in additional scrutiny and oversight from the Welsh Government and the newly formed NHS Executive. As part of this oversight there will be a number of reports and updates that will incorporate mental health.

Financial Implications - None.

Recommendation 28.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government explores the feasibility of a common approach to GP registration across Wales with a view to standardising how this is done across Wales. As part of this study, the feasibility of introducing online GP registration must

be considered. The findings of such a feasibility study should be reported back to the Committee when completed and should be made publicly available.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government is supportive of the view that registering with a GP should be as straightforward as possible and that this process should be consistent across Wales to ensure equity of access. In Wales (and England) there is currently a standard GMS1 form to complete the registration process with a practice.

As part of our ongoing delivery of the Programme for Government commitment of better access to doctors, nurses, dentists, and other health professionals, we will continue to promote key messages around GP registration, including:

- anyone in Wales can register with a GP for treatment;
- it is not necessary to have a fixed address or identification to register;
- anyone who is registered with a GP can get free prescriptions; and
- anyone who needs an interpreter has the right to request one at no cost to themselves. The GP practice has a duty to provide a translator and telephone translation services are available in all GP practices.

Last autumn, our public-facing ‘Help Us Help You’ campaign targeted messages around how to register with a GP to students arriving at universities in Wales, reaching over 30,000 students over the induction period. This engagement activity also emphasised how to access mental health support.

We are aware of the NHS England work programme to introduce an opt-in online registration option for GP practices and will look to take learning from this. Any future online registration process in Wales will need to be considered in the wider context of existing GMS Access Standards and digital access tools. We will be commissioning further research on access needs of people in Wales during 2023-24 and will consider the benefits of online registration as part of this research project. We will share the research report with the committee when available.

Financial Implications - Further research on access needs will have a financial cost. This has been approved as part of the 2023-24 Primary Care Development budget.

Recommendation 29

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government provides the Committee with regular updates on the implementation of the GP to GP Project. These updates should be provided annually as a minimum.

Response: Accept in principle.

The GP to GP Project is led by DHCW. However, the Welsh Government will liaise with DHCW to bring forward regular updates on the project and these will be at least annually.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 30

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government explores the feasibility of establishing a student passport which would enable students to share their healthcare information more easily, and would help mitigate some of the specific challenges faced by a highly mobile population. As part of this feasibility work, a pilot should be supported, with a view to rolling it out across Wales if the pilot is successful.

Response: Accept in principle

The GP to GP project will facilitate a more streamlined approach to transporting mental health information between places of residence. Additionally, the Welsh Government's transitions guidance states that young people who are transitioning from children's to adult services (including mental health) should be provided with a transition and handover plan (also known as a 'Young Persons Passport' in CAMHS services) for young people moving between services so that their pathway between services is clear and all of the necessary information is there for service providers to access – it also prevents young people from having to tell their story twice. The Welsh Government is currently working with Mental Health services to embed the transitions guidance into practice and ensure that these principles are being adopted as best practice.

The National Data Resource (NDR) is the single health record that brings together segregated data into one place. The NHS Wales App (and website) can be used to surface this data to the citizens of Wales, allowing them to share with relevant parties where appropriate. The Welsh Government will review how the app can be promoted, and adapted where necessary so it can be used effectively within mental health services.

As part of this work we will investigate the synergies between the Welsh Government's transitions guidance which promotes the use of a transition and handover plan (also known as a 'Young Persons Passport' in CAMHS services) for young people moving between children's and adults services so that their pathway between services is clear and all of the necessary information is there for service providers to access – it also prevents young people from having to tell their story twice.

Financial Implications - None

Recommendation 31

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government outline in the response to this report whether Health Boards by April 2023 have made the significant improvement expected of them on CAMHS waiting times. If Health Boards have not made the improvements, the Welsh Government should outline what steps will be taken to ensure the necessary improvements are made.

Response: Accept

Meeting CAMHS waiting times continues to be a challenge and services reports patients with more complexity and acuity, and workforce pressures. Despite these pressures, and following additional funding, health boards are making progress. Latest published data for February 2023 show over 90% on the current waiting list for specialist CAMHS services were seen within 28 days of referral. Due to the variation in performance, we commissioned the NHS Delivery Unit (now part of the Executive) to undertake a review of CAMHS. All health boards have now received individual reports and will be developing improvement plans. The NHS Executive is also working with health boards to develop new performance trajectories to either sustain or improve current performance.

Financial Implications - An additional £5m has been made available in 2023/24 via the Service Improvement Fund across mental health services which will support improvements in this area.

Recommendation 32

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government provide an update in response to this report about the work being done to improve the mental health core dataset including: when the work will be completed, when the new data will start to be collected, and how it will be published. As part of this, the Welsh Government should indicate whether the changes will ensure that data is collected on follow-up appointments. If not, the Welsh Government should indicate how performance on follow up appointments is managed and monitored by Health Board and the Welsh Government, and how they envisage the Senedd being able to scrutinise on this issue.

Response: Accept in principle

A key area of work is the strengthening of mental health data. This is being taken forward in several areas and crucially as new services are established.

The mental health core dataset work continues to be taken through the Mental Health Data and Outcomes Measures Board which reports to the Together for Mental Health Ministerial Oversight Board. To further support this work a Technical Group has been set up and reports to the Mental Health Outcome and Measures Board. This group

comprises of health board digital/performance leads and is focusing on the practicalities of collecting and sharing data.

It is recognised that establishing a full dataset is complex and we are prioritising specific data items at each stage to ensure that any data collected is robust and fit for purpose, with the initial focus being on referrals and admissions data. We will also be prioritising demographic data, such as age, gender and ethnicity which will support our ability to plan services based on the needs and demands of our population.

We understand the need to have data publicly available as soon as practicable and we are working towards having an initial national dashboard on mental health activity available by September, we will then broaden this available data incrementally as the core dataset evolves. By December, we will also collect an agreed set of patient experience measures nationally.

We will update the Committee in due course on the date for publication and the frequency of publication.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 33.

The committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government commits to implementation of all the recommendations in Mind Cymru's Sort the Switch report, and to report regularly on progress in implementing this recommendation.

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government cannot accept this recommendation on the basis that not all the Sort the Switch recommendations directly align with the programme of work which is underway to improve transition services following recent reviews. We can assure the Committee that we have considered the recommendations in the Sort the Switch Report but we have done so alongside our own transition review which included direct engagement with young people as well as other evidence which also needs to be taken account of. MIND Cymru continue to be engaged as part of this process. A more detailed reply is being prepared for the Committee on this matter and in response to the letter which followed a focussed scrutiny session on this important matter.

Financial Implications - None.

**(National) Mental Health Advisory Group for
Further and Higher Education
Terms of Reference**

Key Deliverables

- Provide a set of advice and actions to inform the development of the new Mental Health strategy for Wales
- Establish a national approach to improve primary care access to mental health support for post-16 education students across Wales.
- Establish a consistent approach to mental health referrals and support across the post-16 education sectors and NHS.
- Identify the gaps or barriers in training and resources to equip students to self manage their mental health and wellbeing.

Purpose and Scope of the Group

The group's purpose is to address the following questions:

- What barriers exist to post-16 students to access the correct mental health services and support services and how can they be overcome?
- What (more) can FE and HE institutions do to support prevention and / or early Intervention?

To achieve this, the Group will:

- Review and agree which of the recommendations as set out in the Post-16 mental health policy proposals should be prioritised
- identify any immediate actions that could be taken to address any urgent needs identified
- Interface between health and further / higher education sectors – with a focus on identifying barriers and ensuring equitable access to support where needed.
- Bring sector specific knowledge, providing up to date insight on research and activities in the Mental Health and Education space.

- Advise on the use of routinely collected data across the sectors and how it can inform evidence-based decision making.
- Consider what the Welsh Government can do to support the delivery of a national approach

NB This is not a decision group. The Group's role is to provide advice to inform decisions by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the Deputy Minister for Health and Well-being.

Frequency and Management of the Meetings

The Group will meet initially on 6 February 2023 followed by subsequent bi-monthly meetings.

All meetings will be scheduled in advance and will be conducted via Teams or in person if members would prefer. Meetings will last no longer than two hours.

Duration: The group will be established for a period of 6 months where it will be reviewed to consider the effectiveness of the approach.

Papers for the meeting (along with updates to actions from the previous meeting) will be issued three working days before the meeting.

The secretariat of the meetings will be undertaken by Welsh Government

Chairing of the Meeting

The meeting will be chaired by Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing

Group Membership

The membership will consist of a maximum of ten members. Members have been selected based on their expertise in the field of mental health and well-being, further and higher education sectors and include representatives from student associations.

The membership of the Group, will include:

Chair –Lynne Neagle MS Deputy Minister for Health and Well-being

Orla Tarn, President NUS Wales

Ben Lewis, AMOSSHE, Direct of Student Life Cardiff University

Professor Ann John - Professor, Health Data Science

Amanda Wilkinson - Director Universities Wales

David Hagendyk – Chief Executive Colegau Cymru

Jane Johns, Head of Widening Access and Inclusion, HEFCW

Angela Jones – Public Health Wales

Welsh Government Officials

Alex Slade - Director of Primary Care and Mental Health

Sinead Gallagher – Deputy Director Higher Education

Karron Williams - Snr Quality & Effectiveness Policy Mngr

Matt Downton - Head of Mental Health & Vulnerable Groups

If members cannot attend meetings, they are welcome to send a deputy or provide comments in advance by email.

Reporting Arrangements

Members tasked with completing activities to support the work of the Group are asked to provide updates to the Secretariat according to an agreed timescale.

The Group will report on its deliverables at the 6 months end date.