

Kirsty Williams AM
Minister for Education
Welsh Government

26 February 2019

Dear Kirsty

Degrees of Separation? Welsh Government Response to the Committee Report

Thank you for your response to the Committee's Degrees of Separation report on the impact of Brexit on HE and FE. As you may be aware, a debate has now been scheduled for Wednesday 20 March.

This is a fairly unique Committee report in that it is being considered against a backdrop that is constantly changing. Since the report was published in December 2018 the likelihood of a no-deal Brexit, and the consequent need for clear and proactive Welsh Government planning to mitigate the impact on staff and students has substantially increased.

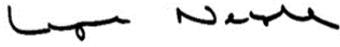
One reason the Committee wished to bring forward a debate as late as possible, was to provide time to fully consider the Welsh Government response against this changing landscape. In light of this, and with time being of the essence, the Committee was concerned that your response was provided later than anticipated. While the Committee appreciates the reasons that may have contributed to this, the delay has provided us with less time to consider the response and to follow-up any areas of concern before the debate.

The Committee considered the response at its meeting on 21 February, and is concerned that in relation to a number of recommendations the response does not provide sufficient clarity, or fails at all to respond to the specific recommendations made. The Committee's concerns are set out in the attached Annex.



It would be extremely helpful, ahead of the scheduled debate, if the Welsh Government would address these concerns. We would be grateful for a response by 12 March, so that this can help inform the Committee's debate.

Yours sincerely



Lynne Neagle AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair



Recommendation 1. *The Welsh Government should proactively demand, via any future UK Immigration Bill, executive powers for Welsh Ministers that allow them to make spatially different immigration rules specifically for students and academic staff in Wales. Michelle Brown AM does not agree with this recommendation.*

The Welsh Government makes it clear that it will engage with the UK Government's consultation on its future immigration white paper. Can the Welsh Government please clarify:

- exactly what it will ask of the UK Government in relation to staff and student immigration to meet the outcomes outlined in its response; and
- whether or not one of its demands from UK Government during the consultation will be for differential immigration rules for staff and students in Wales, as per the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation 4. *The Welsh Government must ensure that the Study in Wales website and marketing material, which is part of the Global Wales programme, is urgently updated and refreshed, not least to include information on the 2019/20 EU student funding guarantee.*

The Committee welcomes the Welsh Government's acceptance of this recommendation. However, the Committee understands that the Study in Wales website is in the ownership of Universities Wales, which suggests that the Welsh Government would not have authority to undertake the actions it has set out in the response without working closely with Universities Wales. The Committee will be grateful for some clarification on this point.

Recommendation 6. *The Welsh Government, as part of its response to this report, should provide information regarding the expected impact of the Global Wales II programme, including the expected student numbers and other quantifiable benefits.*

The Committee was disappointed that the response did not include the detailed and quantitative information specifically set out in the recommendation particularly since the Welsh Government states it has accepted this recommendation. This information would allow the Committee to properly scrutinise a £3.5 million Welsh Government Brexit intervention. In line with the original recommendation, can Welsh Government please set out:

- the original business case or bid documentation for Global Wales II;



- any agreed final quantitative targets for scholarships / international mobilities and expected international student numbers;
- all of the programme deliverables where these are not included in the above; and
- details of any funding gateways / triggers for releasing further funding where these are not included in the above.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government must work with the higher and further education sectors to put in place and test funding arrangements that will guarantee no financial disruption or uncertainty for ERASMUS+ students, particularly those on modern language degrees, taking into account the conditions attached to the current Treasury guarantee. The Welsh Government must report back to this Committee when it has done so.

The Committee was disappointed that the Welsh Government's response offers no assurances to students expecting, or required to undertake an international mobility in 2019/20. The Committee's recommendation was intended to gain assurances on avoiding short-term disruption to students, not the longer term replacement of the programme which the Welsh Government's response focuses on.

Can the Welsh Government provide details on how it is planning to avoid short-term disruption to 2019/20 mobility students in the event of a no-deal (taking into account the conditions attached to HMT's guarantee) and if it has tested these arrangements.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government must commission a further research project, building on the recent work which informed the international mobility pilot, to develop a more detailed picture of the impact of international mobility on the outcomes of students from under-represented groups in Wales, and report back to the Committee within 6 months.

The Committee welcomes the positive steps the Welsh Government has already taken in relation to international mobility. However it is unclear from the response as to whether or not Welsh Government has agreed to undertake and publish the study. Can the Welsh Government:

- confirm that it will commission this study in-line with the recommendation; and
- that the study will specifically address under-represented groups in higher education.



Recommendation 11. *The Welsh Government must commit to working jointly with the further education sector to jointly develop and publish a plan, funded by a EU Transition Fund bid and taking account of the differing regional needs, to identify and respond to any changing skills demands in those sectors most likely to experience Brexit related disruption.*

The Committee welcomes the Welsh Government's acceptance of this recommendation, and welcomes the details set out regarding the work undertaken with / by the Regional Skills Partnerships. However, it does not appear from the response that a joint-plan of the nature the Committee recommends will be drafted. Can the Welsh Government:

- clarify if such a joint-plan is to be developed; and
- provide details of the projects mentioned in the response.

Recommendation 12. *The Welsh Government must recognise the fundamental importance of research and innovation to the prosperity of Wales and recognise the danger inherent in falling behind England and Scotland in funding these activities in what is an extremely competitive setting. The Welsh Government must therefore begin to immediately fund the recommendations made by Professor Reid in his review.*

The Committee is concerned that the Welsh Government only accepted this recommendation in part, and that it continues to not provide the necessary funding to implement all the recommendations made by Professor Graeme Reid.

The Committee notes that Professor Reid's recommendations were made in response to the potentially transformational opportunities offered by the increased UK Government investment in research and innovation, and by the likely loss of European funding which Welsh universities have been reliant upon. The Committee believes the recommendations offer a means of realising very significant opportunities for the whole of Wales post-Brexit.

The Committee understands that, in the short-term, HEFCW intends to work with Welsh Government to establish the different funds recommended by Professor Reid. Can the Welsh Government confirm what support it will provide to HEFCW to enable it to achieve this in the short-term.

