

Proposed Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure Committee

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Response to Welsh Assembly Government Consultation from National Union of Students

Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2008

Consultation Document No: 046/2008

The National Union of Students in Wales welcomes the consultation on the Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure and we are grateful of the opportunity to input into the consultation. The structure of our submission is outlined below:

A brief introduction to the National Union of Students (NUS)

Consultation questions - Local curriculum

Consultation questions - Joint working

Consultation questions - Learning coach and personal support

1. The National Union of Students (NUS) and National Union of Students in Wales (NUS Wales)

NUS Wales is the national voice of students in Wales representing over 250,000 members studying in further education colleges and universities. It is a democratic organisation governed by elected representatives forming the Welsh National Executive Committee. The Committee consists of 3 full time sabbatical officers and 11 part time officers (3 of which represent Further Education).

NUS Wales is an autonomous 'special region' within NUS UK with separate constitution and policy-making powers. NUS Wales policies are voted by delegates at our Winter Council and Spring Conference.

We shall address exclusively the questions that have a direct relevance to our membership.

2. Consultation questions - local curriculum.

We agree with the principle of increasing learner choice via co-operation between organisations. It is crucial, however, that any co-operation, be it formal or informal, is transparent, accountable and representative.

NUS Wales believes representation of students needs to be an essential component of any partnership working between education providers.

Formal proposals, agreed by partnerships of education providers and local authorities, will need to be subject to consultation in order to guarantee accountability and transparency.

3. Consultation questions - joint working.

3.1 Joint working in the context of planning

The Beecham Report and the Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales chaired by Sir Adrian Webb (Webb Review) highlighted the need for partnership working and for citizen-centred services, where the user/citizen is engaged in the process of service design. We, therefore, support a strategic approach and structures that will promote co-operation.

The collaboration between local education authorities (LEAs), governing bodies of school and FE Institutions is critical to ensure that the local curriculum is applied. A strategic approach to the building of local curriculum and delivery of subjects (both academic and vocational) would be more efficient and cost effective.

3.2 Joint working in the context of delivery

As recognised by the Webb Review, several FE Institutions have carried out collaborative work. NUS Wales believes such collaborative approach should be extended to all institutions as far as possible. We would, therefore, leave to education providers to assess whether a statutory duty is necessary to ensure co-operation. Any introduction of such a duty, however, would need to incorporate the need for greater choice and learner voice.

The joining of prospectuses and sharing of courses and/or resources between institutions should be a vehicle to guarantee greater choice of courses and more opportunities for a student to develop more soft skills.

3.3 Joint working and barriers to co-operation

NUS Wales believes that there are barriers that need to be overcome in order for FE Institutions to work in co-operation. Greater flexibility and enhanced co-ordination needs to be put in place when planning joint working. In particular, we raise the following important points that need to be addressed at the planning stage:

Timetabling: in order for a student to take advantage of the co-operation opportunities he/she will need to travel between institutions. NUS Wales notes that reasonable time should be given between lectures to enable students to travel.

Travel: it is essential that there is clarity on where the responsibility for transport provision lies.

NUS Wales would like to see a **generic system of timetabling**, taking into consideration the needs to students with disabilities and student carers, to ensure that all partnering institutions are following a common protocol.

Currently, not all FE Institutions recognise student representative activities as authorised absence upon which the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is dependent. Consequently, many students are denied the opportunity to participate in extra curricular and representational activities under the threat of losing their EMA.

NUS Wales calls for a **nationally agreed protocol** on the EMA to ensure that students do not lose their entitlement to the allowance for participating in representative activities.

4 Consultation question - learning coach and personal support

Institutions should be consistently focusing on "how they can improve the quality of provision. NUS Wales calls for quality enhancement to be incorporated into the inspectorate process in order to create a step-change in the culture of quality. All post-16 education institutions should be required to have a strategy on how they will consistently improve their quality in relation to the learner experience, and not merely be content with fulfilling a set of approved standards. Students need to be incorporated as essential partners in improving the quality of the education and training provision. There needs to be recognition of the work done by Student Union officers in the Estyn Inspection and QAA process and their need for training.

Student Unions support and encourage students to participate in providing feedback and thus enhancing the quality of their institutions. Nevertheless, at present, Further Education Institutions are not required to provide any funding to support their Student Union. This has an adverse impact on student representation and support and students' ability to respond to consultations. The Foster Review of Further Education in England recommended that 0.5% of all Institution Funding should go to Student Unions/Associations. NUS Wales would like to see a similar measure in Wales.