

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales' Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales 2017. This submission responds to those issues under discussion by the Committee. HEFCW has responded to only those issues within its expertise and functions.
- 1.2 HEFCW regulates fee levels at higher education and some further education institutions in Wales, ensures a framework is in place for assessing the quality of higher education and scrutinises the performance of universities. HEFCW use resources from the Welsh Government and others to secure higher education (HE) learning and research of the highest quality, make the most of the contribution of HE to Wales's culture, society and economy and ensure high quality, accredited teacher training.
- 1.3 HEFCW regulates the following institutions:
  - Aberystwyth University;
  - Bangor University;
  - Cardiff University;
  - Cardiff Metropolitan University;
  - Grŵp Llandrillo Menai;
  - NPTC Group;
  - Swansea University;
  - University of South Wales;
  - University of Wales Trinity Saint David; and
  - Wrexham Glyndŵr University.
- 1.4 HEFCW funds all regulated institutions as well as the following institutions:
  - Gower College; and
  - Open University in Wales.
- 1.5 HE in Wales operates in a UK and international context and this has been accounted for in our response.

## **2. Including looking at the role of key players: the Regional Skills Partnerships; the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB); and Sector Skills Councils**

- 2.1 All HEFCW funded institutions in Wales work with their local Regional Skills Partnership (RSP). The Open University in Wales works with all three RSPs given that it delivers HE across Wales. HEFCW expects its funded institutions to work with RSPs and consider how they are able to meet regional skills needs. HEFCW has developed a policy that requires its funded institutions in each RSP to collectively nominate an individual to be a representative to HEFCW. That representative will set out to HEFCW how its funded institutions are engaging with each RSP and responding to regional skills needs.

- 2.2 RSPs are required to identify sectors where apprenticeship provision should be prioritised to support the development and growth of the regions. Higher education representation on the RSPs will, in time, allow for the exchange of information and ongoing identification of requirements for apprenticeships with a higher education component, including a degree. HEFCW assisted Welsh Government with the development of the specification given to RSPs to produce Regional Skills Employment Plans in 2017.
- 2.3 HEFCW notes that WESB will consider apprenticeship developments in an expansion of its remit and that there will be a sub-group of WESB dedicated to apprenticeships. HEFCW is not clear what the full membership of WESB is but we would welcome that there will be appropriate HE representation on the board and in the sub-group to ensure that discussions concerning higher level apprenticeships are considered fully.
- 2.4 To maximise the market for apprenticeships, which are a key instrument in developing the skills required for economy and society, we believe that, where possible, the apprenticeship system across the UK should be simple to navigate, avoiding nugatory differences between national approaches, to improve understanding and accessibility to learners and employers.

### **3. How can better parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes be achieved?**

- 3.1 It is HEFCW's view that the following could help create better parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes especially in relation to higher level apprenticeships:
- Providing the opportunity for individuals in Wales to achieve a university qualification up to and including level 8 through a vocational route so that both routes offer the same type of qualifications;
  - Universities being involved in all or part of the delivery of some apprenticeships at levels 4 and above so that vocational and academic routes are promoted alongside each other;
  - Clear flexible pathways that allow individuals to switch between vocational and academic routes as they progress to higher level qualifications; and
  - The establishment of a new single strategic authority for post-compulsory education and training which would oversee the planning, funding and regulation of both vocational and academic routes would be helpful in this respect;
  - Good quality impartial information, advice and guidance around apprenticeships and using well known, well regarded employers to highlight the value they attach to apprenticeships.

### **4. To scrutinise the development of higher level Apprenticeships, with the support of further and higher education institutions?**

- 4.1 Currently the involvement of Welsh universities in apprenticeships is limited although there are some Welsh university qualifications on apprenticeship

frameworks in Wales. Arrangements for apprenticeships in Wales do not currently allow for universities being an apprenticeship provider in Wales. In England, at least 60 universities and other HE institutions are implementing or planning to implement degree level apprenticeships in the 2017/18 academic year and there are expected to be more than 7,600 degree apprentices in 2017/18.<sup>3</sup>

- 4.2 In Wales progress is being made on a number of fronts. HEFCW is working closely with Welsh Government to assist with the development of its policy to allow prescribed qualifications at level 6, and potentially above, become part of apprenticeship landscape in Wales. However, key Welsh Government decisions are still required in relation to the future funding of apprenticeships at degree level and the role that universities can play in the overall apprenticeship landscape.
- 4.3 In October 2016 HEFCW received a revised remit letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education<sup>4</sup>, a financial allocation was made to HEFCW to address four areas including the development of investment in higher level apprenticeships.
- 4.4 In relation to investment in higher level apprenticeships, HEFCW has required institutions' plans to develop degree level qualifications which could form part of an apprenticeship. It was clarified by Welsh Government officials subsequently, that the development of investment in higher level apprenticeships should be in the broad subject areas of:
- Engineering,
  - Advanced manufacturing and
  - IT/computing.
- 4.5 HEFCW set out an expectation that institutions undertake development work in collaboration with RSPs, employers and relevant sector skills councils. Ultimately, it is hoped that the development work will lead to qualifications being validated and forming part of apprenticeship frameworks in Wales. HEFCW-funded institutions are expected to report back on developments in Autumn 2017.
- 4.6 Building on existing strengths HEFCW-funded institutions have responded positively to the circular indicating an interest to develop qualifications in a number of subject areas, including in the following:
- Control and instrumentation;
  - Data science;
  - Civil engineering;
  - Digital media;
  - Software engineering;
  - Mechanical engineering;
  - Manufacturing engineering;
  - Cyber security.

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<sup>3</sup> [Universities UK & HEFCE, \*Degree Apprenticeships: Realising Opportunities\*, March 2017](#)

<sup>4</sup> [HEFCW website, \*Revised Remit Letter 2016-17\*, October 2016](#)

- 4.7 Institutions have also indicated future interest in higher level apprenticeships in the following subject areas should they meet Welsh Government apprenticeship priorities:
- Health and social care;
  - Chartered management;
  - Welsh-medium management;
  - Hospitality, tourism, transport and leisure;
  - Compound semi-conductors (at Masters level);
  - Sports coaching;
  - Education.
- 4.8 Welsh Government has established a task and finish group to provide clarity on the oversight of the quality assurance of apprenticeships. HEFCW and the Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (QAA) are members of that task and finish group. Separately, HEFCW has membership of the QAA group which is looking to develop a UK-wide characteristics statement for apprenticeships with HE qualifications. Given that apprenticeship policy across the devolved nations is at different stages of development in respect of the use of university qualifications in apprenticeships, it has been agreed that an interim position statement will be developed until policy across the UK becomes clearer and HEFCW and WG have been active contributors.