

Students' involvement in fee and access planning processes

HEFCW welcomes students and Students' Unions involvement in a wide-range of discussions and decision-making processes to develop and improve institutions' structures and processes.

This information on fee and access planning sets out some ways in which the student body and Students' Unions can make a significant contribution to the fee and access plan process.

What are fee and access plans?

Fee and access plans (plans) in their current form were introduced in the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015. They set out how institutions will spend a percentage of tuition fee income to support equality of opportunity and promote higher education. Because fee income is used in this way it is important for students and Students' Unions to be involved in the process.

Student involvement helps to ensure that the plans benefit current and future students, including students studying at partner institutions. We want to help students to be involved in fee and access planning, despite the complexities of the planning cycle. The process of developing, approving, implementing and monitoring plans takes place over several academic years.

Why are fee and access plans important?

Institutions must have a fee and access plan approved by HEFCW to charge tuition fees to full-time, undergraduate and PGCE (QTS) home and EU students. The Welsh

Government wants fee and access plans to make a significant contribution to widening access to groups under-represented in higher education.

What information is in a fee and access plan?

Fee and access plans include information on:

- the **institution**;
- **fee levels**, including different fees to be charged for courses; and
- **student groups under-represented in higher education**.

They also make a range of commitments about:

- **activities** that attract and retain students from under-represented groups in higher education;
- **financial support** for students;
- the amount of **fee income** to be invested in these activities;
- course **fees**;
- **targets** to support equality of opportunity and the promotion of higher education;
- **investment in targets** that support equality of opportunity and the promotion of higher education; and
- how **plans** will be **delivered and monitored**.

Once plans are approved by HEFCW each year, institutions **publish** this information on their **website**, including: their governing bodies' approval of plans and information about fee levels, fee income, fee and access plan investment and spending, partnership information and targets.

What is the Welsh Government's and HEFCW's advice to institutions on student involvement?

The Welsh Government gives guidance to HEFCW about fee and access planning, and we provide annually guidance to institutions on developing fee and access plans. Both sets of guidance are available on our [website](#). The Welsh Government and HEFCW expect institutions to engage with their students in developing, monitoring and evaluating their plans. HEFCW asks institutions to confirm how they implement good practice as set out in the following documents:

- the principles in the [Wise Wales statement on partnership for higher education](#), which identifies good practice in student engagement;
- [Breaking down the barriers to student opportunities and youth social action](#), which provides a framework and toolkit for student partnership and engagement;
- [Guide to providing information to prospective undergraduate students](#), which advises institutions on providing easily accessible information for prospective students to use when making decisions about higher education study.

What does HEFCW do to help students become involved?

HEFCW works closely with the National Union of Students Wales (NUSW) and we meet with them every year to discuss fee and access planning. We also run workshops and contribute to events where the NUSW thinks it would be useful. The President of NUSW is an observer on HEFCW's Council, which is the HEFCW body responsible for, among other things, fee and access planning.

How can students contribute towards fee and access planning?

The **timescales** for HEFCW and institutions to finalise fee and access plans each year are challenging. Plans are finalised around the time that most Students' Unions are changing sabbatical officers. This means it is important for both **institutions and students to work closely together** to make sure that the plans meet the needs of students. Some ways in which students can contribute are through:

- **the Student Charter and Relationship Agreement:** All regulated institutions have a Student Charter and Relationship Agreement. These documents emphasise the importance of **partnership working between staff and students**, and are reviewed jointly, on an annual basis, to make sure they continue to meet the needs of staff and students. These documents should underpin approaches to collaborative working on fee and access planning.
- **the governing body:** Governing bodies are **responsible** for institutions' fee and access plans. **Student representatives are members of governing bodies**, which enables students to be fully involved in the development, review and monitoring of plans.

- **working with partner institutions:** Institutions have partnership arrangements, for example, franchise provision with organisations, such as further education colleges. Institutions and students should work with **student representatives at partner organisations** to ensure their views are represented in the fee and access plans.
- **student representatives:** Student representatives often have **knowledge and expertise** in issues which are relevant to fee and access planning, such as current campaign priorities, the demand for student support, including financial support, and student needs as they relate to students with protected characteristics, groups under-represented in HE and students studying in Welsh. Therefore, student representatives are well-placed to contribute to fee and access planning.
- **evidence:** Students may have evidence to help institutions identify groups that are under-represented in higher education and how **student financial support or financial information, advice and guidance is best provided**. Students may have evidence of how beneficial, or otherwise, actions to improve retention and student success have been and what more might be done to support student success.
- **campaigns:** Student campaigns at UK, Wales or local levels can inform plans' **objectives, priorities and targets**.
- **target-setting:** Institutions set targets in their plans to demonstrate their anticipated progress. Students and Students' Unions can play an important role in **agreeing targets**, ensuring targets are **ambitious** and account for the fee and access investment in categories of provision.
- **monitoring:** It is important for **students to be involved in the monitoring** of previous fee and access plans, as students are best placed to consider whether the aims and objectives of the plans have been met.

How can awareness of fee and access plans be promoted?

The student body and Students' Union officers change annually, so it is **essential** for institutions and students **to ensure new and existing students understand and are updated about the fee and access planning process**, including how they can be involved. This is particularly important as plans are agreed, delivered and

monitored over at least three academic years. This can be done through, for example:

- **Students' Unions** including training on engaging in fee and access planning as part of their induction of new and existing student representatives;
- **NUSW training or events** on fee and access planning; and
- **handover updates, including written updates, from outgoing student representatives** on fee and access planning approaches and priorities at their institutions.

Examples of good practice in collaboration between institutions and students

The current fee and access plan process is relatively new, so more information on good practice will emerge over time. In future fee and access planning, **institutions, and students could proactively work together** to raise awareness of the value of students' contributions to the fee and access process. Some examples of how institutions and students should be working together are:

- **improving student and staff collaboration** by creating a Student Engagement Unit to capture and transmit the student voice, including as this informs fee and access planning;
- ensuring that the results of **student surveys**, including the National Student Survey, UK Engagement Survey, Postgraduate Taught (PTES) and Postgraduate Research (PRES) Experience Surveys are used in fee and access planning;
- having **regular conversations about fee and access planning** between Students' Union representatives and the institution's senior management team;
- including **student representation on senior committees** and groups;
- involving Students' Union officers in deciding how the institution should support **under-represented groups** in plans, and ensuring that students continue to be involved in **monitoring and reviewing** the plans;
- working with the Students' Union to get **good quality feedback** to inform planning and evaluation;

- **embedding a student-staff liaison committee** in each academic school/department with a remit to consider fee and access planning;
- involving the Students' Union in an **annual review of progress** on engagement with students including their contribution to fee and access planning;
- providing an **annual report to students** on how fee and access plan investment was used in the previous year.

Can institutions make changes to fee and access plans after HEFCW has approved them?

Institutions can ask HEFCW to agree changes to approved fee and access plans. HEFCW requires institutions to **discuss any proposed changes with students**, including those studying at partner organisations, at an early stage and confirm that they have done so.

How are fee and access plans monitored and evaluated?

Governing bodies are responsible for monitoring and evaluating fee and access plans. They are advised by committees, which include student representatives. These committees should meet regularly to monitor the progress and performance of fee and access plans. The plans may have been discussed and agreed with student representatives that are no longer at the institution. However, **current students are well placed to consider whether the investment was sufficient and effective.** Such assessment provides valuable feedback to institutions and should inform the development of future plans.

Each year, normally in the **autumn term**, institutions are required to provide HEFCW with an **annual monitoring statement (AMS)** confirming their fee and access plan performance and investment against agreed targets. This AMS includes providing an explanation where targets are not met, and confirming investment in equality of opportunity and promotion of higher education, including student support. HEFCW provides feedback to institutions on their AMSs and recommends that institutions discuss their **monitoring outcomes and HEFCW's feedback with students.** This may be the first time that new student representatives or officers will be involved with the fee and access plan process. It is **important for students to be involved in this**

process, as understanding monitoring processes and the outcomes of previous plans will help them understand the institution's approaches and performance as well as inform their contributions to new plans.

Institutions must evaluate fee and access plans to assess their effectiveness. They must develop **evaluation frameworks** before they begin to deliver the plans. We recommend and encourage institutions to ask students to contribute to the evaluation processes.

Further information

Further information on fee and access planning, including the most recent annual guidance, is available on [HEFCW's website](#). You can also email cynqorrheoleiddio@hefcw.ac.uk or regulationadvice@hefcw.ac.uk.