

# Higher Education in Wales

*A update prepared by the National Assembly for Wales' Research Service for a conference hosted by the ECC*

## *Elections and political manifestos*

Following the UK General Election in May 2015, inevitably thoughts in Wales turn to the Assembly elections in May 2016. The Welsh political parties' manifestos haven't been published yet but already the Welsh Conservatives have said publicly that they would "scrap the Welsh university tuition fee grant".

## *The Diamond Review*

After the Assembly elections, another key date in September 2016 will be the publication of, and the next Welsh Government's response to, the recommendations of Professor Sir Ian Diamond's review.

At the end of 2013, the Welsh Government commissioned Professor Sir Ian Diamond to undertake an independent review of student support and higher education finances. Sir Ian and his team are due to produce a factual summary of the evidence in November 2015 and a final report and recommendations by September 2016. Amongst other aspects, he is looking at widening access to higher education, long term financial sustainability for the sector, as well as funding for part-time and post-graduate provision.

## *Two other reviews and a Task and Finish Group*

Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills made three announcements about two Reviews and a Task and Finish Group which will affect the higher education sector in Wales:

### ***1. Review of the Regulation and Oversight of Post-Compulsory Education and Training in Wales, with special reference to the future role and function of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), July 2015***

Professor Ellen Hazelkorn has been asked to undertake a review of the governance, regulation and oversight of post compulsory education in Wales. The Review will review, analyse and document the current arrangements for the oversight of post-compulsory education and training in Wales, including:

- funding of education and training;
- governance;
- quality assurance / standards of education and training; and
- management of risk

and the future role and function of HEFCW.

Professor Hazelkorn has also been asked to report on the effectiveness of current arrangements, make recommendations for future oversight and highlight any need for future legislation. The Review is due to report in Spring 2016.

### ***2. Proposals for an independent review of conservatoire provision in Wales, September 2015***

At the end of September 2015, Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills asked officials to draw up proposals for an independent review of conservatoire and related performing arts provision in higher education in Wales.

### ***3. Accreditation Criteria Task and Finish Group for Initial Teacher Education and Training, October 2015***

Following a “disappointing” inspection report, by Estyn into the North and Mid Wales Centre for Teacher Education in October 2015, Huw Lewis announced that Professor John Furlong would chair a Task and Finish Group to revise the current statutory criteria for accreditation and implement change. The Minister said “more needs to be done to accelerate the process of improvement in our provision of ITET across the whole of Wales if the sector is to act as a key driver to build workforce capacity.”

Professor Furlong has also reported to the Welsh Government earlier this year (March) on recommended options for reforming initial Teacher Education and Training provision in Wales.

#### *Governance of the higher education sector*

The *Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015* received Royal Assent on 12 March 2015: has it had any impact so far?

In many respects, the regulatory system established by the 2015 Act provides for continuity with the established regulatory regime, so the Act hasn’t heralded huge changes in higher education in Wales. The Act deals with three areas of higher

education governance: Fee and Access Plans; Quality Assessment and Financial Assurance. Transitional arrangements started on 1 September 2015, with full implementation of the new Act on 1 September 2017.

*Other key developments for higher education research in Wales*

Several Welsh universities are undertaking significant new capital or developmental projects for example:

- Carwyn Jones AM, First Minister of Wales visited Swansea University's new £450million science and innovation Bay Campus (itself officially opened on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015) to officially open the College of Engineering's Engineering Quarter on 15 October 2015.
- The designs for the £20million Menai-Science Parc were unveiled for Edwina Hart, Minister for the Economy, Science and Transport by Bangor University Vice Chancellors (October 2015).
- 90 new research fellows from across Europe will come to Wales to grow Wales' world class scientific research, funded by £17million. The Welsh Government has secured £7million from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions COFUND scheme, part of the EU Horizon 2020 programme. The Welsh Government, in partnership with Welsh universities, will provide £10million match-funding. The new fellows will work with researchers based at Cardiff, Swansea, Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities, as well as the University of South Wales (USW).
- The Executive Chairman of British Airways, Keith Williams, opened a new £3.3million development of the Aerospace Centre at the USW in October 2015.
- Four internationally-renowned academics have been appointed through the first phase of the Sêr Cymru ("Stars Wales") Science for Wales programme. The programme also supports the development of 3 national research networks in each of the Welsh Government's 'grand challenge' areas: life sciences and health; low carbon, energy and environment; and advanced engineering and materials. The Welsh Government is now launching the second phase of Sêr Cymru.

**Prepared by Anne Thomas**  
**Arweinydd Tîm Ymchwil / Research Team Leader**  
**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales**

**October 2015**



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