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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government

Consultation – summary of responses

Support for doctoral study

August 2018

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Support for doctoral study

Audience	Higher education institutions, other providers of higher education and respondents to the consultation.
Overview	Summary of responses to the Welsh Government's consultation on support for doctoral study.
Action required	None – for information only.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Higher Education Division Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ e-mail: HEDConsultationsMailbox@gov.wales
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at https://beta.gov.wales/consultations
Related documents	<i>Support for doctoral study – consultation</i> https://beta.gov.wales/support-doctoral-study

Contents

Introduction	4
Summary	5
Responses	6
Questions and themes	7
Welsh Government response	13
Annex: List of respondents	14

Introduction

1. The Welsh Government undertook consultation¹ on the proposal to support students ordinarily resident in Wales and EU students studying in Wales who are undertaking designated courses leading to the award of a doctoral qualification. This document summarises the key themes from the responses received to that consultation and provides the Welsh Government response.

¹ <https://beta.gov.wales/support-doctoral-study>, Welsh Government, 2018, WG33258

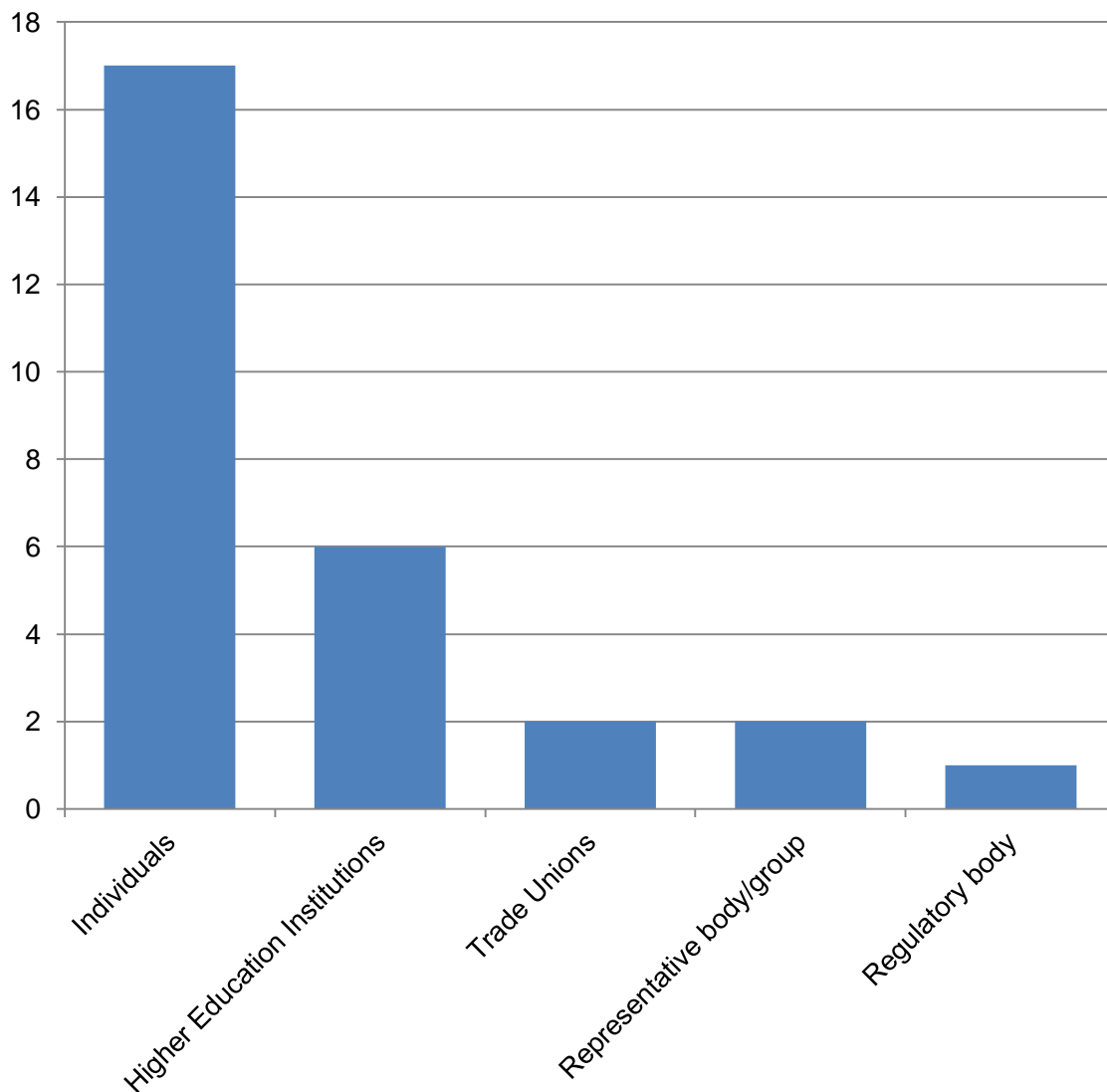
Summary

2. The Welsh Ministers were considering introducing loan support for those students undertaking doctoral study and sought views on a proposed package.
3. A consultation ran between 8 December 2017 and 2 March 2018. Twenty-eight responses were received. The Welsh Government is grateful to those who took the time to submit their views. A range of views were received. Most respondents supported the introduction of the package as described.
4. The Welsh Government weighed the responses to the consultation and determined to introduce the package as proposed in the consultation document.

Responses

5. The consultation generated twenty eight responses. The largest number was received from a cross-section of the general public, including tutors, enrolling and existing students, and those with an interest in postgraduate study. Responses were also received from higher education institutions ('HEIs'), trade unions, a regulatory body and various representative bodies, mostly within the higher education sector in Wales. The summary demonstrates the breakdown below and a full list of respondents is at annex A.

Figure 1: Consultation responses from different types of respondent



Questions and themes

6. We asked the following questions to establish views on the proposals to provide student support for postgraduate doctoral degrees:

Question 1. Do you agree that support should be provided for doctoral study?

Question 2. Do you agree with the proposed support package as outlined? Is there any aspect you would change? Why?

7. The majority of respondents welcomed the proposals and were positive about the overall policy. Responses resulted in a number of common themes emerging, which are summarised below.

Financial barriers

8. All but one respondent agreed that support should be made available for doctoral study. The respondent that objected suggested that sufficient funding was already available from other sources and that any additional funding should be re-directed through the existing funding mechanisms as a grant, rather than a loan.
9. Some respondents recognised that whilst there were other sources of funding available, it was limited to particular courses of study and there was significant competition to secure the limited funding available.
10. Many respondents suggested that the provision of additional funding through loans would break down social and financial barriers, widen access and subject choice for talented individuals, who may be unable to secure funding through the existing routes including employers. There were comments that students resident in Wales deserved the same opportunities as those ordinarily resident in England.

Increasing the number of researchers

11. Universities Wales commented on the benefit that support would bring. It highlighted that evidence showed the strong link between research and development and national economic growth. It suggested that previous studies had identified that there was an insufficient critical mass of researchers in Wales, despite HEIs being responsible for approximately half of Wales' total investment in research and development. It recommended that Wales should take advantage of its opportunities to ensure that potential doctoral students from Wales were not disadvantaged compared to students in England and elsewhere in the UK.
12. Cardiff University strongly agreed with the provision of support and were encouraged that students in Wales would benefit from the same opportunities as those in England. It added that "a loan scheme is likely to make a

considerable difference to decisions to pursue study and to support the achievement of successful and timely outcomes”.

13. The Open University welcomed the proposals outlined in the consultation paper and in particular that support would be provided for those who choose to study part-time including through distance learning, to ensure the availability of opportunity to as many people as possible.

The funding package

14. Most respondents agreed with the overall funding package, although many suggested that the amount was insufficient to cover the full costs for fees, living and childcare costs, in comparison to the funding provided for student support for undergraduate and postgraduate Master’s study. Whilst many welcomed access to funding outside of the existing competitive route there were also concerns about the level of debt, repayment and retention rates.
15. One HEI reported that they had experienced postgraduate students taking out the maximum loan entitlement, who then fell into arrears with tuition fee payments as they felt compelled to prioritise living costs over tuition fees.

Repayment rates and debt levels

16. One respondent commented that the rate of interest on loans was more expensive than loans available from a high street bank. Others were concerned about multiple debts that additional study and loans would bring.
17. One HEI suggested that bursary schemes were preferable to loans. Although, it recognised that a government funding structure which was financially manageable at a government level was desirable.

Question 3. The Welsh Government considers that the proposed loan does not make any distinction regarding the Public Sector Equality Duty protected characteristics, with the exception of age, in determining eligibility. The protected characteristics set out in section 4 of the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Do you think that there are other issues that the Welsh Government should be aware of which would impact on the take-up of the proposed loan by those with any of the protected characteristics? If so, what steps might the Welsh Government take to mitigate any negative impact?

Age restriction

18. The age restriction generated some debate. Whilst the HE sector and many individuals understood the rationale behind the policy outlined in the consultation, it was deemed a barrier to learning and progression for some.

Gender balance

19. One respondent suggested that women were under represented in academia regardless of ability, due to financial and logistical barriers faced with childcare and family commitments. Whilst they welcomed the loan provision, they thought that childcare grants should be made available to those studying postgraduate doctoral degrees.

Question 4. Do you think that this policy, if implemented, would have effects (whether positive or adverse) on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, and
- on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

Positive impact on the Welsh language

20. The majority of respondents did not think the proposed policy, if implemented, would have an adverse effect on the Welsh language. Respondents remarked that the vast majority of doctorates were offered through the medium of English only and there was limited opportunity for Welsh speakers to pursue a course through the medium of Welsh outside of Wales.
21. Many respondents thought there would be a positive impact on the Welsh Language, particularly the HEIs. They suggested there could be an increase in the numbers of Welsh language courses available which would open up more opportunities for students to conduct their research and study through the medium of Welsh and would encourage Welsh speakers to remain in Wales.

Question 5. How might the proposed policy be formulated or revised so that it would have positive effects, or increased positive effects, on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, and
- on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

More funding to encourage study through the medium of Welsh

22. Aberystwyth University commented that provision alone would not contribute to an increase in the numbers of highly qualified Welsh language users into higher education teaching, government or industry, in line with the Welsh Language Strategy. It recommend that the Welsh Government use the opportunity to consider more competitive grant funding for doctoral students to encourage them to undertake study through the medium of Welsh. One respondent suggested that an additional grant allowance for Welsh speakers should be made available to encourage Welsh speakers to apply.

Question 6. How might the proposed policy be formulated or revised so that it would not have adverse effects, or so that it would have decreased adverse effects, on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, and
- on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Consideration of course choice

23. Many respondents suggested that restricting funding to subject areas such as science, technology, engineering, economics, education, medicine and maths, could create an adverse impact on the Welsh language. This could limit opportunities for those wishing to study on topics relating to the Welsh language and Welsh culture and prevent opportunities for persons to study through the medium of Welsh.
24. Swansea University suggested that the Welsh Government could explore the potential of allocating loans for the completion of doctorates on the Welsh language, literature, and history. However, the overwhelming response from respondents indicted that there should be no restriction to particular subjects.

Question 7. Some potential adverse impacts have been highlighted at paragraphs 62 and 63 including a fall in quality/standards and/or increased study in subject disciplines which may have a lower economic return. What is your view on the likelihood of these occurring, and how significant do you think the impact could be?

Wider choice

25. Overall respondents did not agree that there would be a potential fall in quality or standards. Respondents highlighted the existing competitive nature of research funding and demanding nature of the study, which might impact on the overall economic return. However, the majority of respondents valued the

wider choice of subjects, accepting that there would be less of an economic return in some cases.

26. Many respondents suggested that whilst the typical traditional subjects such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics might be seen to have a higher economic return, they thought that subjects such as the arts and cultural courses were valuable too and contributed to a positive economic return.
27. One respondent thought that standards might fall, due to a lower entry requirement for a course not secured through the competitive route.

Value to employers

28. HEFCW thought that a fall in standards was unlikely and did not consider that there was a significant risk in relation to the variation in economic return of various different subject disciplines. It highlighted a study on the 'Impact of Doctoral Careers', commissioned by Research Councils UK, HEFCE and HEFCW in 2013, which found that doctoral graduates from all subject disciplines are attractive to employers. This reflected the fact that in addition to their specialist subject knowledge, doctoral graduates have a range of valuable skills which enhance their employability, including research and analytical skills, problem-solving skills and the ability to innovate.

Question 8. Do you think that access to funds for doctoral study should be limited to particular types of award and/or subject of award? For example, limited to cases where there is a demonstrable direct or indirect public return? This could include:

- a) Limiting funding for doctoral study to situations where the supervisor was submitted in a research group that achieved above a threshold in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- b) It could also include limiting funding to subject areas where there is an evidenced need for greater numbers of individuals with qualification in this area in Wales as evidenced by HEFCW or its successor body working with the Regional Skills Partnerships. This approach might lead to the encouragement of doctorates in science, technology, engineering, economics, education, medicine and maths.

29. There was no evidence from respondents to suggest that limiting the scope of the loan for particular subjects was a positive approach.

Assurance of standards

30. HEFCW was clear that limiting funding to supervisors in a research group that achieved above a threshold score in the REF should not apply. It suggested that institutions already had an existing validation arrangement or possession

of a Research Degree Awarding Power (RDAP), provided sufficient assurance of standards for the purposes of the doctoral loan scheme.

31. Universities Wales understood the difficulties in implementing a different approach to doctoral loan support in Wales and the impact and would not support the approach for limiting funding by REF, which should not be seen as a proxy for teaching/supervisory quality. It suggested that it would like to see future developments by the Welsh Government to implement agreed recommendations from the Diamond Review in relation to bursaries and to consider the merits of alternative approaches including selective approaches that potentially target priority areas including STEM/high-cost subjects.

Differential standards

32. HEFCW highlighted that by excluding some departments in Wales from the scheme, it could disadvantage students who might not be geographically mobile, wishing to undertake doctoral study in a particular subject. Opportunities for Welsh-domiciled students to undertake doctoral study would be more restricted if they choose to study within Wales rather than if they choose to study elsewhere in the UK, and therefore differential standards would apply.

Reduce innovation

33. University and College Union (Wales) suggested that whilst it may encourage participation in areas where there was evidence of increased need, limiting funds to particular types of award and/or subjects of award ran the risk of reducing innovation in Wales.

Question 9. Are there any other issues about our proposal that you would like to raise?

More clarity

34. Many respondents were content with the level of detail provided in the consultation but welcomed further clarity about the full details of the scheme.
35. No other significant issues were raised that have not already been covered in the summary.

Welsh Government Response

36. The Welsh Government considered and analysed all respondents' comments and views. As a result no significant changes were made to the policy which was set out in the consultation.

37. The Education (Postgraduate Doctoral Degree Loans) (Wales) Regulations 2018 came into force on 25 June 2018. They provide the basis for the system of loan support for students who are ordinarily resident in Wales and EU students in Wales undertaking designated doctoral degree courses in respect of academic years beginning on or after 1 August 2018.

Annex A

List of Respondents

Aberystwyth University
Anonymous (11 responses)
Brierley-Sollis, Tegan
Cardiff University
Crocels Community Media Group
Davies, Jordan
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
Hrastelj, James
McPhee, Ursula
Open University
Popp, Margaret Hannigan
Ridley, Harrison
Royal College of Nursing
Swansea University
Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawn Cymru (UCAC)
Universities Wales
University and College Union Wales
University of South Wales