

Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill

Socio-economic duty assessment

1. What evidence has been considered to understand how the proposal contributes to inequalities of outcome experience as a result of socio-economic disadvantage?

In the Covid Decade: Understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19, the British Academy identified that there had been a huge impact on the availability of tertiary education. During the first lockdown in 2020, only 40% of apprenticeships continued to operate and one in five apprentices left either their learning or employment role. By the 2020-21 academic year, intermediate level apprenticeships continued to see the greatest decline in starts, and the worst-hit subject areas for apprenticeship starts were leisure, travel and tourism; engineering and manufacturing technologies; and retail and commercial enterprise. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to enter into apprenticeships at all levels, and they tend to be most popular with boys from white backgrounds. Therefore the impact of the pandemic on the apprenticeships and employment of apprentices may affect these groups more severely than others.

In terms of higher education, there was an increase of 7000 mature students entering higher education in 2020 which the single highest year-on-year growth since 2009. This is probably due to a weakened job market reflecting demand for new skills or advanced skills following an uncertain economic outlook.

University students' studies were severely disrupted throughout the pandemic, with lower income students being hit harder than those from higher income backgrounds. Lower income students lost 52% of their normal teaching hours in the first lockdown as a result of the pandemic, but those from the higher income groups only lost 40%. Female students were harder hit by the pandemic than male counterparts, reporting that the pandemic had adversely affected their wellbeing more than males.

Academic year 2020/21 demonstrated further progress in widening participation in higher education with record numbers of acceptances of 18-year-olds from those areas and groups with the lowest participation rates: 29,020 UK students from POLAR4 Q1. There continues to be inequalities in numbers of Black, Ethnic and Minority groups entering higher education, with young Black people being the least likely to enter higher tariff providers. A study of five UK higher education institutions found that students from ethnic minority groups, women and low-income students were more adversely impacted by both health and economic consequences of the pandemic and experienced greater disruption to their studies.

The evidence also highlighted that vulnerable groups such as care leavers and care givers, and those students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, are more likely to require part-time work to support their studies, due to the lack of family financial support that those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds would have access to in higher education. During the pandemic, the hospitality and retail sectors were shut down, which eluded those people from getting the financial support they needed at that difficult time.

The proposals have been developed in light of the five ways of working in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Provide a summary of evidence and links

- [The British Academy - Covid Decade: Understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19](#)

2. How could the proposal potentially further exacerbate inequality of outcome experienced as a result of socio-economic disadvantage?

There is no evidence to suggest that the setting up of the Commission will further exacerbate inequality of outcome.

Provisions from the Bill will allow for the setting up of a new Commission to oversee the PCET sector. As this will be an arm's length body, the Welsh Government will not be able to prescribe how the new body will address equality issues. However, under the Socio-Economic duty the Commission will be encouraged by Welsh Ministers to consider how their decisions might help to reduce socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions such as deciding priorities and setting objectives.

Further, under the Equality Act 2010 the Commission will be required to have due regard to advance equality of opportunity between people who have protected characteristics.

3. How could the decision potentially improve outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage?

Successful engagement with learning is widely accepted as a significant determinant of life outcomes including health, socio-economic position and life expectancy. Learners of all ages should be provided with opportunities to develop their capabilities and competencies via a broad range of bilingual learning pathways at all levels of learning, whether full-time or part-time, based in the classroom, the workplace, or both. Individuals should be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning throughout their lifetime. We need to enable learners to transition smoothly between vocational and non-vocational routes. We must provide sound and well-timed advice to support learner's choices reflecting their own ambitions as well as the economic and social needs of Wales.

The Commission for tertiary education is intended to provide long-term benefit to providers, learners and employers by aligning all post compulsory education under one arm's length body and putting learners' needs at the heart of decision-making. This should help to ensure that learners are able to look at all the options available to make informed decisions about learning routes appropriate to their needs and aspirations. The strategy is to deliver coherent progression through and between the different post-16 education sectors, so that the individual's learning pathway meets their needs and aspirations and is not defined by artificial boundaries.

4. How will you monitor the impact of this decision? (Please consider wider outcomes)

The Bill proposals cover a number of areas relating to tertiary provision. These provisions relate to setting up a Commission to oversee tertiary education and research and innovation. They are intended to improve tertiary education in Wales and enable providers to make the best use of Welsh Government funding for education, research and innovation.

Elements of this provision are high level, to allow the Commission to create the detailed systems and processes to operate the tertiary education sector. Therefore the impact assessments are based on the information available at this point in time, prior to the passing and implementation of the legislation.

As part of its annual reporting process the Commission will be required to reflect on progress against its strategic plan which will be drawn up in consultation with stakeholders to deliver against Welsh Ministers' strategic priorities.

Further detail is likely to emerge at the implementation stage of the legislation, with a greater understanding of the potential consequences associated with any changes then being proposed and updated impact assessments could be carried out at that stage. For the Welsh Government, there is in place a full review process for each part of the Bill proposals. These are outlined in Chapter 10 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment. This provides for formal post implementation review at five, ten and fifteen years (dependent on the measure) as well as ongoing review of data as appropriate.

5. Does new monitoring information need to be collected? If so, what?

No, the Commission has wide-ranging powers to collect and analyse data from those in tertiary education and has the powers to collect the necessary information to provide a detailed analysis of learners in tertiary education.