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# Peer review of proposals for evaluation of the Diamond Student Support Reforms

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Title: Peer review of proposals for evaluation of the Diamond Student Support Reforms

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Glossary

<b>Acronym/Key word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
WFGA	Well-being of Future Generations Act
WISERD	Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods
ADRC	Administrative Data Research Centre Wales
SAIL	Secure Anonymised Information Linkage Databank
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
NUS	National Union of Students
HEI	Higher Education Institution
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
MCS	Millennium Cohort Study
SLC	Student Loans Company
SIES	Student Income and Expenditure Survey
LEO	Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset
NPD	National Pupil Database
DfE	Department for Education
ILR	Individual Learner Record Data
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WED	Wales Examinations Database
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas
FEI	Further Education Institution
Brexit	The potential or hypothetical departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Miller Research was commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake a peer review of proposals to evaluate the Diamond student support reforms from June until November 2018. This document presents the review and its findings.

### Background

#### *Current context and basis for the reforms*

- 1.2 In line with many of the current reforms in the education sector in Wales, funding for higher education (HE) and student finance was reviewed between 2014 and 2016. A cross-party panel chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond was tasked with undertaking the review and developing a strategy to fund higher education differently. The new funding arrangements had to meet a number of key aims, including enabling universities to fulfil their broad functions, and fulfilling the Welsh Government strategic objectives to contribute to job creation and growth and secure greater social justice.

**Following publication of the Diamond Review report, the Welsh Government accepted the majority of the recommendations and drew up proposals for a phased approach to implementing reforms. It was agreed that some recommendations should be implemented immediately (2017/2018) and some from 2018/2019 onwards, whilst other recommendations remained to be considered. The phased approach allowed the Welsh Government to focus on areas where they believed reform was needed most urgently. The proposals were the subject of public consultation in late 2016, which supported their development in 2017 allowing commencement of the reforms in September 2018. The phased approach to the full suite of reforms is outlined in**

- 1.3 Annex 1.

### **Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the reforms**

- 1.4 Amongst the reforms it proposed, the Diamond Review noted:

“The Review Panel recognises the importance of ongoing evaluation and therefore recommends that: The Welsh Government should, in collaboration with stakeholders, undertake statistical and research work to monitor and evaluate the implementation of proposed reforms in order to assess their

impact, to understand what works and to learn and apply lessons about the best way to implement these and future reforms. “<sup>1</sup>

- 1.5 Enabling Objective four of the National Mission, 2017-2021 advocates; “Robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system”.
- 1.6 Activities have begun in response to this recommendation. Officials have carried out a scoping exercise to develop an approach to a full impact evaluation of the key elements of the reforms, after drafting a high-level logic model, evaluability assessment and evaluation plan.

### **The peer review**

- 1.7 The aim of the peer review was to critically appraise the proposed approach to the evaluation of the main student support reforms, to recommend improvements and propose the next steps.
- 1.8 More specifically, this peer review has been commissioned to:
  - Critically appraise the theory logic model and evaluability assessment, specifically:
    - Investigate factors that are likely to affect the impacts of the reforms.
    - Comment upon the relevance and completeness of the logic model and evaluability assessment, and the assumptions that are behind them.
    - Identify how they could be improved.
    - Suggest ways of representing the logic model graphically in a way that can be understood by stakeholders.
  - Consider how the evaluation plans explore the extent to which the reforms:
    - Reflect the key Welsh Government priority to ensure the wellbeing of future generations.
    - Will allow Welsh Government to fulfil commitments within the Economic Action Plan and Employability Plan and obligations under the Welsh Language Act and Children and Young Persons Rights Measure.

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<sup>1</sup> [Diamond Panel report, p 66.](#)

- Consider the proposed evaluation programme as a whole, and comment on its quality and potential to draw useful conclusions about the effectiveness and the positive and negative impacts of the key financial reforms.
- Consider useful alternatives to an approach based upon large scale studies procured by Welsh Government.
- Consider the sources of data and other evidence available and proposals for further survey and data matching and analysis, to support evaluation of the reforms.
- Assess the value of these resources in supporting the proposed evaluation programme.
- Recommend, with reasons, how the sources identified might be best utilised.
- Identify where additional data and research would be beneficial, and why.
- Set out an estimate of the potential costs of additional activities, with reasons.
- Offer suggestions as to an appropriate balance of in-house and commissioned work, and the organisation types and expertise that might be required for successful execution of the programme.
- In conclusion, draw together recommendations for a programme to evaluate the main student support reforms, to include:
  - A proposed timetable
  - Suggested methodologies, to include proposed samples
  - Potential costs.

## 2. Key findings and recommendations

### Key findings

- 2.1 Through the review, the draft high level (textual) logic model has been streamlined and represented in diagrammatic format for testing and further refining with stakeholders. Key changes have included rationalising the drivers and objectives for the reforms, to ensure they all relate directly back to the priorities that the Diamond Review set out to address, namely:
- widening access – ensuring that any future system has widening access as its core objective, is progressive and equitable
  - supporting the skill needs of Wales
  - strengthening part-time (PT) and postgraduate (PG) provision in Wales, and
  - long-term financial sustainability<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.2 Another key change to the logic model has been the differentiation of outcomes for the different cohorts of students affected by the reform, namely full-time (FT) undergraduate, PT undergraduate and PG, given that they are likely to vary<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.3 Finally, the other main change to the logic model has been to extend the impacts from a narrow economic emphasis to include a focus on the social wellbeing and social justice aspirations of the Diamond Review.
- 2.4 Stakeholders consulted as part of this peer review have strongly supported investment in an evaluation of the impact of the reforms, and have welcomed a long-term and planned approach, using primary and secondary data of both a qualitative and quantitative nature.
- 2.5 The review has considered the secondary data sources that could be used as measures for an impact evaluation of the reforms, including sample surveys, routine (and census) school, further education (FE), HE and HMRC data, longitudinal studies and linked datasets (including historic data Recommended

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<sup>2</sup> [Written Statement - Statement on the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales](#)

<sup>3</sup> For example, whilst a significant increase in participation (along with retention, completion and widening access) in PT undergraduate HE and postgraduate HE, in FT undergraduate, the likely outcomes are more in terms of widening access and increasing retention and completion. I.e.: stakeholders have suggested that the reforms are unlikely to result in significantly higher levels of participation FT undergraduate HE.

uses for these datasets are set out in the more detailed proposed approach, building on the draft approach developed by Welsh Government.

- 2.6 Nonetheless, existing data sources alone will not provide the necessary evidence to evaluate the impact of the reforms and additional primary research will be required, as described in the approach summarised below and set out in more detail in the full report from this review.
- 2.7 Given the objective of the reforms to widen access to HE, it will also be important for the evaluation to determine how the financial support available under the Diamond reforms influences potential students' decision to consider HE. This would require primary and secondary research with both those who do and those who do not participate in HE, to identify factors that influence decisions to participate or not.
- 2.8 We endorse the proposal that the proposed evaluation be based around three phases as follows:
- A preparation phase devoted to ensuring that systems for generating and using information are developed appropriately to facilitate robust mid-term and final impact evaluations. The principal activities in this phase would include:
    - Planning and designing the 2020-2021 Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) and exploring certain enhancements<sup>4</sup> and opportunities for linkage to other data sources<sup>5</sup>.
    - Exploring the opportunity (perhaps through work with the NUS) for and viability (in terms of costs and robustness of data) of a follow-up Pound In Your Pocket survey, with qualitative follow-up.
    - Building on HEFCW's widening participation target groups, agreeing a definition of 'low participation groups, for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup>Specifically, boosted samples for Welsh-domiciled students as a whole and certain priority groups (parent/carer students, part-time students, care leavers, BME students, students with disability and Welsh speaking students), inclusion of PG students, inclusion of questions about financial hardship and consequent risk to retention and questions relating specifically to the student finance support available to them and the degree to which this influenced their decision to apply to university and inclusion of qualitative follow-up study on financial hardship and risk, to be carried out with Welsh-domiciled students, securing respondent consent to link their SIES responses to specific administrative data sources and planning for the development of an approach to propensity score matching English- and Welsh-domiciled student data from 2020/21 SEIS, and propensity score matching Welsh-domiciled student data from 2020/21 SEIS and Welsh-domiciled student data from 2014/15 SEIS.

<sup>5</sup> Specifically, National Pupil Database' datasets (PLASC and WED), Lifelong Learning Wales Record, HESA student record and SLC grant and loan recipient data.

- Commissioning the first of three longitudinal qualitative studies, to explore the experiences of students subject to different student support regimes. Study 1 would include two cohorts of Welsh-domiciled students<sup>6</sup>. Firstly, a cohort who enrolled in HE in Autumn 2018 (to be interviewed over three waves on an annual basis, starting from Spring/Summer 2019<sup>7</sup>), in order to explore the links between financial support available to students, the choices that they make and effects this has on their HE experience, academic performance and wellbeing<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, a cohort who enrolled in HE in Autumn 2017 (to be interviewed over two waves on an annual basis, starting from Spring/Summer 2019<sup>9</sup>), as a means of measuring differences in experiences to those participating in the three-wave cohort, referred to above.
- Publishing findings from new questions on educational aspirations and barriers in the National Survey for Wales and considering the potential for a follow up survey and/or repeating the questions in future years.
- Commissioning qualitative research with Key Stage 5 students and parents of Key Stage 5 students in order to explore awareness of support for HE students, the extent to which the available support influences aspirations to participate in HE or not, and other influencing factors.
- Exploring opportunities to purchase additional questions on the Beaufort Omnibus survey in relation to awareness of financial support for HE students amongst the general population.
- Conducting quantitative analysis of the HESA Finance Record and working with HEFCW to develop a qualitative approach to analysing annual HEI income and expenditure, including qualitative interviews with HEIs, in order to contextualise the HESA Finance Record.
- Liaising with HESA to understand the intended methodology and questionnaire for the new Graduate Outcomes survey that is currently

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<sup>6</sup> PT and FT undergraduate and PT and FT postgraduate. For further details of the proposed sample composition, please see the main report.

<sup>7</sup> I.e.: in their first, second and third year of undergraduate study (FT and PT), single year of postgraduate study (FT) or first and second year of postgraduate study (PT).

<sup>8</sup> This is not something that could be obtained from existing HE datasets alone.

<sup>9</sup> I.e.: in their second and third year of UG study.

being implemented, to explore degree of comparability with Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education.

- A mid-term evaluation phase focused on measuring outputs and emerging outcomes. The principal activities in the mid-term phase would include:
  - Analysing key secondary data sources, including 2020/21 SIES, linked to HESA student record, PLASC, WED, LLWR, SLC grant and loan recipient data and WIMD, annual SLA and HESA statistics (2018/9, 2019/20, 2020/1, 2021/2, 2022/2, 2023/4), follow-up Pound In Your Pocket survey (if applicable) and Graduate Outcomes survey.
  - Commissioning a second longitudinal qualitative study of Welsh-domiciled students who enrol in Autumn 2022 in Welsh and English institutions, for the purpose of tracking their HE experiences up to the end of the 2024-25 academic year.
  - Analysing annual HEI income and expenditure (2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/4) via qualitative interviews with Welsh Government, HEFCW and all Welsh HEIs and sample of English HEIs and a review of Welsh Government budgets for HE, Annual Remit Letters, HEFCW's annual funding circulars and HEFCW financial health reports.
- A final impact evaluation phase, to measure outcomes and emerging impacts. This final phase would comprise the following principal activities:
  - Analysing key secondary data sources, including subsequent SIES linked to HESA student record, PLASC, WED, LLWR, SLC grant and loan recipient data and WIMD, annual SLA statistics and HESA (2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28, 2028/29), Graduate Outcomes survey and (Historic) NPD data<sup>10</sup>.
  - Commissioning a third longitudinal qualitative study of Welsh-domiciled students who enrol in autumn 2026 in Welsh and English institutions, for the purpose of tracking their HE experiences up to the end of the 2028-29 academic year.
  - Analysing HESA data (Wales domiciled students vs England domiciled students and change over time in Wales domiciled students) and Quarterly Labour Force Survey results (2018-2029)

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<sup>10</sup> To investigate characteristics of those who did and who did not go to university pre-Diamond and who went and did not go post Diamond reforms.

- Analysing annual HEI income and expenditure (2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28, 2028/29) via qualitative interviews with Welsh Government, HEFCW and all Welsh HEIs and sample of English HEIs and a review of Welsh Government budgets for HE, Annual Remit Letters, HEFCW's annual funding circulars and HEFCW financial health reports.

2.9 The causal links between the content of the Diamond reforms and potential outcomes need to be realistic, given that there are a range of external factors that might mitigate or augment any impact of the reforms. The reforms are being introduced during a period of considerable socio-economic change, including the prospect of Brexit and changes to student funding arrangements in England, a demographic decline in the number of school leavers and changes to the post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector overall, including ambitions to create greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes. These factors coupled with a range of other externalities impacting on people's decision to participate in HE or not will prove a challenge for a meaningful and robust impact evaluation of the reforms.

## **Recommendations**

- 2.10 Recommendation 1: Fully implement and further refine the evaluation approach developed through the peer review process and set out in this report, allowing for adjustments to be made to take into account relevant policy changes in Wales and England.
- 2.11 Recommendation 2: Commission a three-phase longitudinal qualitative study of three cohorts of Welsh-domiciled students as part of each phase of the evaluation, enrolled in Welsh and English institutions, specifically:
- The preparation phase cohort<sup>11</sup> of the study would be interviewed for the first time in spring/summer 2019, for the second time in spring/summer 2020 and for the third time in spring/summer 2021.
  - The mid-term evaluation phase cohort of the study would be interviewed for the first time in spring/summer 2022, for the second time in spring/summer 2023 and for the third time in spring/summer 2024.

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<sup>11</sup> For further details of the proposed composition of this cohort, please see Section 4 of this report.

- The final impact evaluation cohort of the study would be interviewed for the first time in spring/summer 2027, for the second time in spring/summer 2028 and for the third time in spring/summer 2029.
- 2.12 Recommendation 3: Commission a qualitative study as part of the preparation phase with students in Key Stage 5 (including those in school and FE institutions) and their parents to understand aspirations, barriers and motivations in relation to participation in HE.
- 2.13 Recommendation 4: Explore opportunities to purchase additional questions on the Beaufort Omnibus survey in relation to awareness of financial support for HE students amongst the general population.
- 2.14 Recommendation 5: Explore opportunities and data protection implications for linking LEO data for Welsh-domiciled students with SLC data on household income on entry to HE and student loan take-up.
- 2.15 Recommendation 5: Explore opportunities for comparing HE data sets for Welsh-domiciled students with HE data sets for English domiciled students.

### **3. Methodology**

- 3.1 The peer review commenced with an inception meeting between the Miller Research team and a research steering group of Welsh Government officials, held at the Welsh Government offices in Cathays Park in July 2018.

#### **Review of programme documentation, current policy and best practice HE evaluations**

- 3.2 Following the inception meeting a review of programme documentation and current policy was undertaken. The documents reviewed included a number recommended by the Welsh Government project team supplemented by additional material. The review was undertaken to fully acquaint the project team with the key facets of the Diamond Review and the policy context of the student support reforms.
- 3.3 A 'snowballing' process was used throughout the peer review. Additional documents were studied as the review progressed; these were suggested during the scoping interviews, data workshop and assumption mapping workshops. A full list of documentation reviewed can be found in Annex 2Annex 2.

#### **Scoping interviews**

- 3.4 A series of scoping interviews was undertaken following the document review to further build on the knowledge and understanding gained from the desk research. Scoping interviews were undertaken with five stakeholders, including academic experts in HE evaluation and the implementation of similar reforms. A full list of stakeholders engaged in the peer review can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Stakeholder List**

Scoping interview participants	Data workshop attendees	Assumption mapping workshops
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government officials (X2)</li> <li>• Representative from Sheffield Hallam University</li> <li>• Representative from Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods</li> <li>• Former Higher Education Scottish Government official</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government officials (x5)</li> <li>• Cardiff University – WISERD representative</li> <li>• Cardiff University – WISERD/Administrative Data Research Centre representatives (x2)</li> <li>• Swansea University – Secure Anonymised Information Linkage/ADRC representative</li> <li>• Higher Education Funding Council for Wales representative</li> </ul>	<p><b>Workshop 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)</li> <li>• The Open University</li> </ul> <p><b>Workshop 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Union of Students (NUS)</li> </ul> <p><b>Workshop 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities Wales</li> </ul>

### Exploration of data sources

3.5 Throughout the scoping stage stakeholders made recommendations regarding data sources to include and how to use them within the student support reforms evaluation. To further support the review of the data sources a data workshop was included in the stakeholder engagement process. The full list of data sources reviewed can be found in Annex 2 Annex 2.

### Data workshop

3.6 A data workshop was held in the Welsh Government, Cathays Park office on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2018. Workshop attendees included a range of academics, industry experts and data experts within Welsh Government. The full list of stakeholders engaged in the peer review can be found in Table 1. The workshop provided useful information on access to and potential uses and limitations of a variety of data sources.

### Assumption mapping stakeholder workshops

3.7 Three assumption-mapping workshops took place over a two-week period in October 2018. The workshops took place in Tramshed Tech, Welsh Government offices in Cathays Park and the Universities Wales office in Cardiff Bay. The stakeholders in attendance at these workshops can also be found in Table 1. The assumption-mapping workshops allowed stakeholders to review the diagrammatic logic model and discuss the potential linkages between each of the stages.

## Peer Review Report

- 3.8 The Miller Research team collated the information gathered from these distinct qualitative engagements and discussed it with the research steering group prior to the drafting of the final report.
- 3.9 This report documents the detailed findings of the process and presents recommendations for a way forward for the evaluation of the student support reforms.

### *Underpinning principles*

- 3.10 This review has been underpinned by a number of core principles, namely:
- The need to focus on the relationship between the Diamond Review recommendations and the intended outcomes and impacts of the reforms.
  - The need to balance the views of a range of stakeholders with different expertise and organisational priorities and varying levels of understanding of evaluation theory and practice.
  - The need to recognise the limitations of the peer review and how far it is practicable to outline in detail an approach, given uncertainties over the political and economic landscape and key external factors, outside the control of the Welsh Government, HE providers and students, which may affect the impact of the reforms<sup>12</sup> and which challenge the long term relevance of plans for evaluation.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, changes to student support policy in England, wider reforms to the PCET Sector in Wales and Brexit,

## 4. Detailed findings

### Examples of other evaluations of similar reforms

4.1 The peer review included a desk review of evaluations of a broadly similar subject matter or involving a comparable methodology. Scoping interviews with stakeholders also covered any involvement they may have had in previous activities assessing the impact or potential impact of student finance reforms or of other relevant policy reforms. The majority of the evaluations related to Wales only, although a small number had a UK or international scope. The review focused on the approach, sample size and structure, data sources, approach to impact assessment and lessons learnt from each study. Evaluations were identified through the stakeholder interviews and from an internet search, and included:

- The formative and impact evaluation of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (2018)
- Evaluation of the Financial Contingency Fund (2013)
- Evaluation of financial support for students in Further Education in Wales (2015)
- Evaluation of the Education Maintenance Allowance (2014)
- Evaluation of the Assembly Learning Grant (2015)
- Fair and flexible funding: A Welsh model to promote quality and access in higher education (The Rees Review) (2005)
- Graduate Indebtedness: Its perceived effects on behaviour and life choices - Literature Review (2018)
- Socio-economic disadvantage and experience in higher education (2003)

### *Lessons learnt from previous evaluations*

4.2 Some but not all the reports of previous studies acknowledged shortcomings or limitations to the methodologies adopted within them, especially with regard to impact measurement. Where applicable, stakeholders highlighted issues or weaknesses in studies they had been involved with previously. These issues have been considered in the context of the proposed approach to evaluating the main Diamond reforms, and include:

- Impacts from policies or programmes intended to influence HE participation are likely to take many years to be evidenced. Therefore, a robust evaluation needs to be long-term and longitudinal<sup>13</sup> in nature, taking into account impacts upon aspirations and choices amongst secondary school pupils, and the effect of past students' experience of long-term debt repayment upon attitudes amongst potential future students.
- The challenge of evaluating policies that involve a host of complicated and interrelated changes and assigning attribution to the different elements<sup>14</sup>.
- The factors that influence a potential HE student's decision to participate in HE or not are multifaceted and not always straightforward or expressed truthfully: *“previous studies have mistakenly taken young people's reasons for not applying – for example money – at face value, as often this is an easy and more acceptable ‘excuse’ to conceal other reasons around fear of failure or of the unknown.”*<sup>15</sup>
- Student characteristics and financial support arrangements vary widely and the range of combinations of these mean that extremely large samples are required in order to confidently identify patterns in the impact of financial support upon their choices and outcomes.
- Quantitative analysis can be undermined if not all people in a sample provide consent for their data (for example HESA and HMRC) to be used for the purposes of research or evaluation.
- Lack of detailed and reliable data on graduate employment in Wales, makes it difficult to generalise about links between student support and graduate employment and earnings.
- Reliance on secondary datasets means that evaluators have no control over the content of the data made available to them.
- Over-emphasis on economic impacts, without sufficient focus on social, cultural and emotional impacts can limit the breadth of outcomes and impacts observed.
- An absence of qualitative elements to evaluation can result in a lack of understanding of how a relationship between student support, student choices and observed outcomes comes about and the process by which an individual makes decisions about participation in HE.

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<sup>13</sup> One academic stakeholder suggested tracking potential HE students from as early as Key Stage 3 as part of the evaluation of the Diamond reforms. Another study recommended studying the consequences of student debt over several years following graduation, given that effects may accrue over time.

<sup>14</sup> This point supports the decision to focus the evaluation only on the main student support reforms only (i.e.: the changes to full and part time undergraduate and postgraduate maintenance and tuition fee support, and the recommended tuition fee level) and not the Diamond reforms in their entirety.

<sup>15</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

- The issue of cross-border movement of Welsh-domiciled and English-domiciled students, who are subject to different student funding regimes, particularly in the context of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding in England<sup>16</sup>, influencing choices made by English-domiciled students that indirectly impact on the opportunities for and choices by Welsh-domiciled students.
- The variation in costs (housing, transport etc) and institution level grants and subsidies between universities and the impact this will have on students' financial situation and, in turn, wellbeing, which is external to the Diamond reforms.
- The challenge of recruiting those who do not participate in HE and identifying causality for non-participation.

### **Relevance and completeness of the logic model**

#### *Overview*

- 4.3 As part of this peer review process, the draft high level (textual) logic model for the evaluation of the student finance reforms<sup>17</sup> was reviewed and represented in diagrammatic format for testing and further refining with stakeholders.
- 4.4 Given that the policy drivers and objectives for the reforms were defined prior to the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales, it has not been the remit of this peer review to rehearse the logic and rationale for the reforms. The focus instead has been on activities – essentially the scope of the key student finance reforms – and the relationship between these activities and the resulting outputs, outcomes and impacts from the student finance reforms. Nonetheless, in order that stakeholders could track the logic right through from the policy drivers to the impacts, the logic model was provided to them in its entirety.
- 4.5 Below is the initial version of the logic model, which was based on the content of the high-level textual logic model and was shared with stakeholders prior to the interviews and workshops that took place during the peer review process.

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<sup>16</sup> It is expected that the review will report in early 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Produced internally within Welsh Government.

<b>Policy Drivers</b> What are the key policies driving the rationale for the Student Support Reforms?		<b>Needs</b> What is the need for the Student Support Reforms? There is a need...		<b>Objectives</b> What are the objectives of the Student Support Reforms / What are they trying to achieve?		<b>Inputs/ Resources</b> What are the Student Support Reforms inputting in order to achieve the objectives?		<b>Activities</b> What is Student Support Reforms doing with the inputs in order to achieve the objectives?		<b>Outputs</b> What is being directly produced from Student Support Reforms's Activities?		<b>Outcomes</b> What are the short term and medium-term results and outputs?		<b>Impacts</b> What are the long-term results from these outputs?	
P.1	Prosperity For All Agenda	N.1	To increase students ability to meet their expenses (maintenance)	OB.1	To reduce inequalities in access to HE that are due to financial limitations	IN.1	Project Steering Group, project team, project manager, project management and governance systems	A.1	Increase total maintenance support to National Living Wage level, with means-test based tapered grant, supplemented by loan	OP.1	Improved maintenance support	OC.1	Improved financial position of students - A reduction in debt from overdrafts, arrears, credit, bank loans and insecure loans with an increased level of income-contingent loan-based debt.	IM.1	Improvement in labour force education and qualification levels, which should lead to health, wellbeing and economic growth benefits.
P.2	Prosperity For All: Economic Action Plan	N.2	To supplement state support for those whose parents cannot or will not provide financial support	OB.2	To reduce the consequences of reliance by students on overdraft, credit, arrears, bank loans and insecure loans (financial barriers to attainment of life goals, stress and mental health impacts)	IN.2	The Diamond Implementation Stakeholder Group	A.2	Provide universal £1,000 pa maintenance grant to full time undergraduates	OP.2	Students could experience an increase in the cost of participation, living and housing (prices increase as a result of students having more cash to spend).	OC.2	Increase in individuals student loan debt - associated stress and impact on attainment of life goals	IM.2	Increased rate of higher level skills and qualifications amongst Wales' labour force
P.3	Prosperity For All: Employability Plan	N.3	To support families whose salaries are above the current threshold but are still struggling to supplement their dependents' study costs.	OB.3	To increase qualification levels attained by Welsh-domiciled students	IN.3	Communications and marketing / awareness raising plan	A.3	Provide universal pro-rata £1,000 pa maintenance grant to part time undergraduates	OP.3	An increase in the range of options for part time study models	OC.3	Increase in the number of students accessing HE.	IM.3	More affordable funding system, which enables Wales' institutions to remain financially viable.
P.4	Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers	N.4	To increase the amount of maintenance support available to part-time students	OB.4	To contribute to reduction in regional and national skills gaps			A.4	Set maximum parental income for regional grant eligibility to the 8th decile	OP.4	An increase in funding available to Wales' HEIs	OC.4	Increase in the proportion of students remaining on and completing FT undergraduate courses, and representation of low participation groups in these activities.		
P.5	Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)	N.5	To enable post graduate students access to maintenance and fee support	OB.5	To increase the proportion of Welsh workforce qualified to Level 4			A.5	Offer up to £17,000 support (mix of loan and means tested grant) for taught masters students for fees and maintenance	OP.5	An increase in awareness amongst students and parents of the financial support available for HE study	OC.5	Increase in enrolment, remaining on and completing PT undergraduate courses, and representation of low participation groups in these activities will increase.		
P.6	The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales	N.6	To reduce the impact of the Tuition fee grant on HEFCW and enable HEFCW to allocate funding to other HE priorities	OB.6	To make student finance support provided by WG more affordable and sustainable			A.6	Communications campaign to raise awareness of offer, eligibility etc			OC.6	Increase in enrolment, remaining on and completing post-graduate courses, and representation of low participation groups in these activities will increase.		
				OB.7	To reduce public expenditure on student fees and thereby afford to meet the costs of other WG HE priorities			A.7	Tracking and management of demand for loans and modifying the offer as appropriate			OC.7	Reduction of the impact of finance on HE enrolment, retention, completion		
		N.7	To increase the amount of fee support available to part-time students	OB.8	To increase rates of retention and completion in HE			A.8	Remove tuition fee grants and provide support for full time students in the form of loans to cover up front costs of tuition			OC.8	Reduction in the impact of financial pressures on student wellbeing		
								A.9	Strengthen HEI accountability for widening access			OC.9	Increase in allocation of finance to other Welsh Government priorities for HE and FE		
						A.10	Consider reforms in the context of the PCET sector			OC.10	Strengthened financial position of HEIs				
								A.11	Consider implementing fully regulated part time system whereby part time student fee loans would be available on a pro-rata basis						

### *Assumptions mapping*

- 4.6 Assumptions are beliefs about stakeholders and a policy or programme, as well as the changes or improvements that may be realised by a policy or programme. Being explicit about assumptions is one of the first and most important considerations during programme or policy design, implementation, and evaluation<sup>18</sup>. Assumptions may be internal (in the case of student finance reform, this could be assumptions about the actions of prospective HE students, Welsh Government and HEIs and the implementation of a communications campaign, for example) or external (assumptions about HE policy in England or implications of Brexit, for example). Clarifying and making explicit the assumptions behind the Diamond reforms, in terms of both the specific elements related to the reforms and the assumptions embedded in the theory driving the reforms, has been critical to developing a valid and viable logic model.
- 4.7 As part of this peer review therefore, we have obtained feedback on both the individual stages of the draft logic model, but also the assumptions that link each individual stage.
- 4.8 Comments on the different elements of the initial draft are summarised below.

### *Policy drivers*

- 4.9 It has been within the brief for this peer review to consider how the evaluation plans might explore the extent to which the reforms reflect the priorities and commitments within the following key Welsh Government policies:
- Prosperity For All: Economic Action Plan
  - Prosperity For All: Employability Plan
  - Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers
  - Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)
  - Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011
- 4.10 Given that the Prosperity for All agenda and Welsh language strategy were published after the completion of the Diamond Review, whilst it will be of value for the evaluation to consider the extent to which the reforms contribute to

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<sup>18</sup> Shakman, K. and Rodriguez, S.M., Education Development Center, Inc. *Logic models for program design, implementation, and evaluation: Workshop toolkit*, 2015

these policy areas, they cannot be considered drivers for the review<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, the emphasis on economics and employability also risks limiting the focus of the evaluation of the reforms, which should also consider impacts in terms of social justice and wellbeing<sup>20</sup>.

- 4.11 Therefore, the main policy drivers for the reforms are the Diamond Review itself, along with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The contribution to these two policy agendas would need to be factored into the evaluation.

### *Needs and Objectives*

- 4.12 The objectives for the reforms all need to relate directly back to the priorities that the Diamond Review set out to address and what the Review Panel was seeking to achieve. In summary, the priorities for the Review, as set out by Welsh Government were<sup>21</sup>:

- widening access – ensuring that any future system has widening access as its core objective, is progressive and equitable
- supporting the skill needs of Wales
- strengthening PT and PG provision in Wales, and
- long-term financial sustainability.

- 4.13 There is a danger in making the objectives too explicit and therefore the finalised local model is focused on these four key priority areas, specifically:

- To widen access and ensure that any future system has widening access as its core objective, is progressive and equitable. This replaces the objective “To reduce inequalities in access to HE that are due to financial limitations”, as set out in the initial logic model.
- To support the skill needs of Wales. This incorporates and replaces the following objectives: “To increase rates of retention and completion in HE”, “To increase qualification levels attained by Welsh-domiciled students”, “To contribute to reduction in regional and national skills gaps” and “To increase the proportion of Welsh workforce qualified to Level 4”, as set out in the initial logic model.
- To strengthen PT and PG provision in Wales.

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<sup>19</sup> Stakeholder comments in asset mapping workshop

<sup>20</sup> Scoping interviewees and stakeholder comments in asset mapping workshop

<sup>21</sup> [Written Statement - Statement on the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales](#)

- To ensure long-term financial sustainability of higher education funding and student finance arrangements. This incorporates and replaces the following objectives: “To make student finance support provided by WG more affordable and sustainable” and “To reduce public expenditure on student fees and thereby afford to meet the costs of other Welsh Government HE priorities.”

4.14 Most of the objectives included in the initial version of the logic model are incorporated into one of these four objectives. One goes beyond the scope of these priority areas and has therefore been removed. Namely: “To reduce the consequences of reliance by students on overdraft, credit, arrears, bank loans and insecure loans (financial barriers to attainment of life goals, stress and mental health impacts)”.

#### *Inputs and activities*

4.15 The inputs were broadly accepted by stakeholders with only the inclusion of ‘finance’ as an additional input<sup>22</sup>.

4.16 For the sake of clarity, and in keeping with the Diamond Review proposals, activities have been separated into FT undergraduate, PT undergraduate and PG. Activity 9 (strengthening HEI accountability for widening access) was seen to be critical to the success of the reforms. HEI activities could both encourage applications and support existing students: *“this is about better promotion of hardship grants and more consistent rates of support. At the moment some universities offer huge amounts of support and others very little.”*<sup>23</sup>

4.17 Activity 7 (Tracking and management of demand for loans and modifying the offer as appropriate) is beyond the scope of the main Diamond reforms<sup>24</sup>, whilst Activity 10 (Consider reforms in the context of the PCET sector) is an externality to be considered as part of the evaluation of the Diamond reforms, rather than an element of the reforms themselves<sup>25</sup>. Activity 11 (Consider implementing fully regulated part time system whereby PT student fee loans would be available on a pro-rata basis) is imprecise and is beyond the remit of the main Diamond reforms<sup>26</sup>.

#### *Outputs*

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<sup>22</sup> Stakeholder comments in assumption mapping workshop.

<sup>23</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>24</sup> Stakeholder interviewee and view of Miller Research.

<sup>25</sup> View of Miller Research.

<sup>26</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop and view of Miller Research.

- 4.18 Output 2 (Students could experience an increase in the cost of participation, living and housing (prices increase as a result of students having more cash to spend) was widely queried as being implausible: *“there is no causal link between providing students with more cash and rental costs going up.”*<sup>27</sup> Furthermore if the evaluation was to identify a rise in rental costs that could be attributed to the reforms, it would be an outcome (as a result of improved financial position of students) rather than a direct output of the reforms<sup>28</sup>. One stakeholder described this proposed output as *“a bit of a red herring.”*<sup>29</sup>
- 4.19 Another suggested that the increase in disposable income of students could give them more buying power to demand better quality housing<sup>30</sup>, although again, this would be an outcome; furthermore, it does not relate directly back to the main recommendations from the Diamond Review and would therefore be an unintended outcome<sup>31</sup>. Nonetheless, it is recognised as a possibility that an increase in the cost of participation and other goods and services offered by HEIs to students with increased spending powers could result, inadvertently, from the reforms, and this should therefore be monitored as part of the evaluation, with HEIs disclosing their charges on a ‘basket of goods’.
- 4.20 A priority for the Diamond Review was to strengthen PT HE provision in Wales and in the recommendations the Review Panel proposed that for HEIs to: *“be eligible for high cost subjects top-up payment, HEIs must be able to demonstrate to HEFCW that they deliver part-time education in a manner that encourages students to be able to earn as they learn (i.e. the funding is predicated on the organisation in receipt being regulated to ensure quality and organisation.”*<sup>32</sup> This does not explicitly relate to increasing the range of PT options however, and therefore output 3 (An increase in the range of options for part time study models) is not valid: *“more students equals more provision, but not necessarily a wider range.”*<sup>33</sup>
- 4.21 It was suggested that the provision of financial support for PT students could result in greater demand for PT options, which in turn could impact on supply:

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<sup>27</sup> Stakeholder interviewee

<sup>28</sup> View of Miller Research.

<sup>29</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop

<sup>30</sup> Stakeholder interviewee

<sup>31</sup> View of Miller Research.

<sup>32</sup> *The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales Final Report*, p. 46

<sup>33</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop.

*“there could be an increased range [of PT options] as [universities] will see it as a way to make more money.”* This is outside the scope of the Diamond reforms however, and so would be an unintended outcome.

- 4.22 Output 4 (An increase in funding available to Wales’ HEIs) duplicates Outcome 9 (Increase in allocation of finance to other Welsh Government priorities for HE) and has therefore been removed<sup>34</sup>.
- 4.23 Output 5 (An increase in awareness amongst students and parents of the financial support available for HE study) is particularly relevant to students from families that have not participated in HE before<sup>35,36</sup> and will be directly dependent on the quality and effectiveness of the student finance communications campaign<sup>37</sup>: *“this system is definitely for everyone and everyone will benefit from it ... it’s just about making sure that everyone is aware of the support available.”*<sup>38</sup>

### Outcomes

- 4.24 Outcome 1 (Improved financial position of students - a reduction in debt from overdrafts, arrears, credit, bank loans and insecure loans with an increased level of income-contingent loan-based debt) is a key outcome from the reforms, although the wording could be clearer, to prevent an interpretation that students are expected to come out with a lower level of debt: *“not a reduction, just a change in profile”*<sup>39</sup>.
- 4.25 The evidence from previous research<sup>40</sup>, endorsed by comments from stakeholders at all stages of this peer review suggests that Outcome 2 (Increase in individuals’ student loan debt - associated stress and impact on attainment of life goals) is improbable. Nonetheless, it is possible and should be taken into consideration as part of the evaluation.

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<sup>34</sup> View of Miller Research.

<sup>35</sup> Potential students with parents who have not participated in higher education are more likely to be eligible for higher levels of financial support.

<sup>36</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>37</sup> View of Miller Research.

<sup>38</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>39</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop.

<sup>40</sup> Fair and flexible funding: a Welsh model to promote quality and access in higher education, Final Report of an Independent Study into the Devolution of the Student Support System and Tuition Fee Regime in Wales (The Rees Review), 2005 and Harrison, N. and Agnew, S. (2016) [Individual and social influences on Students’ attitudes to debt: A cross-national path analysis using data from England and New Zealand](#). Higher Education Quarterly, 70 (4). pp. 332-353. ISSN 0951-5224.

*“People are unlikely to be concerned, especially as many students are content to have a ‘graduate tax’ and accept that their degree shouldn’t be paid for by the tax payer.”*

*“It’s a ‘neverland’ ... most students are not aware of the implications of student debt.”*

(Stakeholder comments from assumption mapping workshops)

- 4.26 It was acknowledged that the repayment of student loans is income-contingent and on the basis of a UK-wide policy approach, the Review Panel recognised that graduates could be positively or adversely affected, should the threshold for or rate of repayment change. From April 2018, the repayment thresholds for post-2012 loans increased from £21,000 to £25,000 and £41,000 to £45,000, following changes to the composite regulations made by UK Government and Welsh Government.
- 4.27 Outcome 3 (Increase in the number of students accessing HE) is potentially too simplistic, especially in terms of FT undergraduates, where the decision to participate in higher education is complex and affected by a number of influences, including but not limited to finance<sup>41</sup>: *“There seems to be an assumption that an increase in money equals an increase in application and retention. I’m not sure if there is enough evidence for that assumption.”*<sup>42</sup>
- 4.28 There is a possibility that the reforms – specifically the increase in maintenance support – could lead to a change in the proportion of students who choose to live at home with their parents, to reduce maintenance costs<sup>43</sup>.
- 4.29 Factors that may influence how far numbers might increase include:
- The social risk of not liking university or not fitting in at university.
  - The long lead-in time for aspiring to higher education: *“for the reforms to influence whether or not someone chooses to go to uni [sic] will take a long time and so they are unlikely to have an effect immediately. This*

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<sup>41</sup> Evidence from literature review and stakeholder interviews.

<sup>42</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>43</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

*is because generally people are aiming for academic, vocational, or employment routes at GCSE stage.*<sup>44</sup>

- Debt aversion, which is known to be proportionately higher amongst under-represented groups and potential students from lower socio-economic groups<sup>45</sup>.
- Poor levels of awareness amongst people in under-represented groups of the support available to them.

4.30 Given the more significant change in support for PT undergraduate and PG students, it is in these types of courses that there is likely to be an increase<sup>46</sup>. Nonetheless, via an effective communication campaign along with external mechanisms like outreach work in the community and schools by HEIs, an increase in under-represented groups should be achievable across all study modes (FT and PT) and both undergraduate and PG levels – albeit in the medium to longer term in the case of FT undergraduates<sup>47</sup>.

4.31 Outcome 4 (Increase in the proportion of students remaining on and completing FT undergraduate courses, and representation of low participation groups in these activities). This outcome relates to two distinct issues and these need to be articulated separately. As mentioned immediately above, the delivery of an appropriate communications campaign amongst other things may result in bringing a more proportionate representation of students from under-represented groups into higher education.

4.32 The two main assumptions behind increased retention and completion resulting from the main Diamond reforms are that a higher level of maintenance support for all based upon the concept of progressive universalism means that:

- Students are less likely to drop out due to financial hardship, including debt from insecure loans and arrears.
- Students are less likely to take on part-time work in order to meet their maintenance costs and are therefore less likely to neglect their academic studies and to drop out due to falling behind / academic failure.

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<sup>44</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>45</sup> Harrison, N. and Agnew, S. (2016) [Individual and social influences on Students' attitudes to debt: A cross-national path analysis using data from England and New Zealand](#). Higher Education Quarterly, 70 (4). pp. 332-353. ISSN 0951-5224.

<sup>46</sup> Multiple stakeholder interviewees, stakeholder comments in assumption mapping workshops and view of Miller Research.

<sup>47</sup> Stakeholder interviewee and view of Miller Research.

- 4.33 Stakeholders have identified factors that could mitigate against these (positive) outcomes. Findings from recent research suggest that lower income students who do not take out a student loan are more likely to drop out of higher education<sup>48</sup>. Also, the shift from subsidised fees to loans for fees could see students averse to taking out the student loan struggling to meet the costs of their fees<sup>49</sup>. Whilst this is unlikely to affect significant numbers of lower income students in Wales, given that most would be entitled to grant support or would take out a loan, it is something that could be monitored as part of the evaluation.
- 4.34 Furthermore, it has been suggested that “widening access may reduce retention / completion rates as harder-to-reach students are drawn into the system.”<sup>50</sup>
- 4.35 Outcome 5 (Increase in enrolment, remaining on and completing PT undergraduate courses, and representation of low participation groups in these activities will increase) is appropriate, based on the assumption that providing a greater level of support to those wishing to pursue a PT undergraduate courses will make it more financially viable for more people<sup>51</sup>. As with Outcome 4, however, an increase in enrolment and retention on and completion of PT course and increased representation of low participation groups are separate outcomes and need to be presented as such.
- 4.36 Outcome 6 (Increase in enrolment, remaining on and completing PG courses, and representation of low participation groups in these activities will increase) is also valid, although again these are two discrete outcomes that should be distinct. The impact on PG take-up may be affected by the level of loan the student already has (due to borrowings during undergraduate study). It is possible that those with higher levels of undergraduate student loan debt may be less inclined to incur further debt through PG participation. Loan debt will typically be higher amongst those starting an undergraduate degree from September 2018 than amongst those who enrolled prior to the Diamond reforms being implemented.

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<sup>48</sup> Blackburn, L (2016) Borrowing behaviour by young low-income students from Scotland: an exploratory study.

<sup>49</sup> Stakeholder interviewee

<sup>50</sup> Stakeholder interviewee

<sup>51</sup> Multiple stakeholder interviewees, stakeholder comments in assumption mapping workshops and view of Miller Research.

- 4.37 An increase in take-up of PG study is also probable amongst older students, for whom it is now financially viable to participate: *“there’s likely to be a huge increase in take-up of masters, for example amongst those in horrible jobs who couldn’t afford a masters after graduating, but now can, as well as those who go straight from undergraduate.”*<sup>52</sup>
- 4.38 Outcome 7 (Reduction of the impact of finance on HE enrolment, retention, completion) whilst valid, unnecessarily duplicates Outcomes 3, 4, 5 and 6.
- 4.39 Outcome 8 (Reduction in the impact of financial pressures on student wellbeing) is logical, although multifaceted in its manifestation. At a very basic level, having access to more support for maintenance should reduce any detrimental effects of financial hardship. In addition, having more support in the form of loans or grants, may influence how students spend their time at university, potentially reducing the need to work part-time and providing more time for studies, engagement in university social and sporting activities and/or meaningful work experience, any of which are likely to impact positively on students’ wellbeing<sup>53</sup>. Finally, and indirectly, the issue of poor standards of student accommodation could be affected, given that students having more disposable income gives them more buying power to demand better quality housing<sup>54</sup>.
- 4.40 Attribution of any changes to wellbeing will be challenging however, given that whilst finance can be a significant influence on mental health issues and stress for HE students, there are other factors and pressures, including (with potentially adverse effects) a lack of mental health support available in general or gaps in wellbeing services in the medium of Welsh specifically, and (with positive effects) increased onus on HEIs and health boards to increase provision of mental health services, via policy directives separate to the Diamond Review<sup>55</sup>.
- 4.41 Outcome 9 (Increase in allocation of finance to other Welsh Government priorities for HE) is logical based on the financial calculations made by the Diamond Review Panel, however it would be important for the evaluation to explore how this finance is allocated, and in particular how much is directed

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<sup>52</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop.

<sup>53</sup> Multiple stakeholder interviewees and view of Miller Research.

<sup>54</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>55</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop and stakeholder interviewee.

into support for student welfare and wellbeing; many stakeholders felt that Outcome 9 should be linked to Outcome 8<sup>56</sup>.

- 4.42 Outcome 10 (Strengthened financial position of HEIs) is likely to result from both an increased allocation of funding to other priorities for HE and an increase in participation in higher education (particular PT undergraduate and PG) and so for the purposes of the logic model, is an impact.

### *Impacts*

- 4.43 The three impacts set out in the initial logic model were thought to have an overly economic emphasis and an insufficient focus on the social wellbeing and social justice aspirations of the Diamond Review.
- 4.44 Impact 1 (Improvement in labour force education and qualification levels, which should lead to health, wellbeing and economic growth benefits) should be split into personal benefits to individuals (both financial and social) and societal benefits (both economic and social)<sup>57</sup>. In the longer term, the overall increase in economic impact of HEIs across Wales could also be observed<sup>58</sup>.
- 4.45 Impact 2 (Increased rate of higher-level skills and qualifications amongst Wales' labour force) is valid<sup>59</sup>.
- 4.46 Impact 3 (More affordable funding system, which enables Wales' institutions to remain financially viable) are two separate, if inter-related impacts. Removing the cost to government of subsidising student fees makes for a more affordable funding system (an impact in itself). As noted above, there are several factors resulting in HEIs in Wales becoming more financially viable (including a more sustainable funding system), and this should be recognised as a separate impact<sup>60</sup>.
- 4.47 Below is the finalised logic model for the evaluation.

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<sup>56</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop and stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>57</sup> Multiple stakeholder comments in assumption mapping workshops, multiple stakeholder interviewees and view of Miller Research.

<sup>58</sup> Stakeholder comment in assumption mapping workshop.

<sup>59</sup> Multiple stakeholder comments in assumption mapping workshops, multiple stakeholder interviewees and view of Miller Research.

<sup>60</sup> Multiple stakeholder interviewees and view of Miller Research.

Policy Drivers		Needs		Objectives		Inputs/ Resources		Activities		Outputs		Outcomes		Impacts			
P.1	The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales	N.1	To increase students ability to meet their expenses (maintenance)	OB.1	To widen access and ensure that any future system has widening access as its core objective, is progressive and equitable	IN.1	Project Steering Group, project team, project manager, project management and governance systems and finance	A.1a	Increase total maintenance support to National Living Wage level, with means-test based tapered grant, supplemented by loan	OP.1a	Improved maintenance support offer for full time students	OC.1a	Improved financial position of full time students - A reduction in debt from overdrafts, arrears, credit, bank loans and insecure loans with an increased level of income-contingent loan-based debt.	IM.1a	Improvement in education and qualification levels and therefore individual earning capacity		
		N.2	To supplement state support for those whose parents cannot or will not provide financial support	OB.2	To address the skill needs of Wales	IN.2	The Diamond Implementation Stakeholder Group	A.1b	Set maximum parental income for maintenance grant eligibility to the 8th decile	OP.1b	Improved maintenance support offer for part time students	OC.1b	Improved financial position of part time students - A reduction in debt from overdrafts, arrears, credit, bank loans and insecure loans with an increased level of income-contingent loan-based debt.	IM.1b	Improvement in individual health and wellbeing		
		N.3	To support families whose salaries are above the current threshold but are still struggling to supplement their dependents' study costs.	OB.3	To strengthen part-time and postgraduate provision in Wales	IN.3	Communications and marketing / awareness raising plan	A.1c	Offer up to £17,000 support (mix of loan and means tested grant) for taught masters students for fees and maintenance	OP.1c	Improved maintenance support offer for post-graduate students	OC.1c	Improved financial position of post-graduate students - A reduction in debt from overdrafts, arrears, credit, bank loans and insecure loans with an increased level of income-contingent loan-based debt.	IM.2	Increased rate of higher level skills and qualifications of the Welsh workforce		
		N.4	To increase the amount of maintenance support available to part time students	OB.4	To ensure long-term financial sustainability of higher education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales			A.2a	Provide universal £1,000 pa maintenance grant to full time undergraduates					OC.2a	Increase in the proportion of students remaining on and completing FT undergraduate courses		
		N.5	To enable post graduate students access to maintenance and fee support					A.2b	Provide universal pro-rata £1,000 pa maintenance grant to part time undergraduates					OC.2b	Increase in enrolment, remaining on and completing PT undergraduate courses		
		N.6	To enable HEFCW to allocate funding to other HE priorities					A.3	Remove tuition fee grants and provide support for full time students in the form of loans to cover up front costs of tuition					OC.2c	Increase in enrolment, remaining on and completing post-graduate courses		
		N.7	To increase the amount of fee support available to part-time students					A.4	Communications campaign to raise awareness of offer, eligibility etc	OP.2	An increase in awareness amongst students and parents of the financial support available for HE study	OC.3	Increased representation of low participation groups (including students who are male, BME and/or from a lower socio-economic class, and mature students) in FT and PT undergraduate and PG FE				
								A.5	To collaborate with stakeholders to undertake statistical and research work to understand what works and apply lessons					OC.4	Increase in individuals student loan debt	IM.3	More affordable funding system for Welsh Government/ HEFCW
														OC.5	Reduction in the impact of financial pressures on student wellbeing		
														OC.6	Increase in allocation of finance to other Welsh Government priorities for HE	IM.4	Strengthened financial position of HEIs
<b>Unintended Outcomes</b>																	
												UOC.1	An increase in the price of goods and services that students need				
												UOC.2	FT numbers may reduce as potential students opt instead for PT HE courses				
												UOC.3	Stress and negative impact upon life goal ambitions associated with an increase in individual student loan debt				

## Quality and usefulness of proposed evaluation approach

### Introduction

- 4.48 The proposed evaluation approach met with widespread approval during this peer review process: “*this one is the most developed projects/evaluations I’ve worked on.*”<sup>61</sup>
- 4.49 The main areas for improvement or further development of the proposed approach are as follows:
- The need to avoid focusing on the economic impacts of the reforms only, without giving due attention to the social justice elements of the Diamond reforms, for example: equality, health and wellbeing benefits.
  - The risk of setting too prescriptive an approach and the need for flexibility, given the lack of guaranteed continuity of survey datasets<sup>62</sup>.
  - The need to look at proportions of numbers enrolling and completing HE courses in relation to the universe, rather than actual numbers, to control for differences in cohort size, year-on-year<sup>63</sup>.
  - The need for retrospective tracking of current HE students’ academic performance and levels of affluence/deprivation from as early as Key Stage 3.
  - The need to include those who do not participate in HE in order to understand the reasons for non-participation and compare outcomes (economic, social and in terms of health and wellbeing) with those of graduates.
  - The need to capture factors external to the main Diamond Reforms which may impact on students’ decisions to participate in HE or not, for example outreach work done by HEIs in schools (pull factor) and wider reforms to the PCET Sector which could make vocational routes more appealing (push factor).
  - The need for student characteristics variables, for example ethnicity, disability or care experience, to establish the extent to which patterns in enrolment, retention and completion amongst these groups reflect patterns in the wider population.

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<sup>61</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>62</sup> In the data workshop it was, for example it was noted that the Employers Skills Survey and Employer Perspectives Survey, run by the former UK Commission for Employment and Skills have both been stalled, for example. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey is expensive and if DfE stopped funding it, an alternative dataset would be required.

<sup>63</sup> In particular, lower numbers of students in Key Stage 5.

### *Key secondary data sources*

4.50 The following paragraphs summarise the key sources of secondary data that would be drawn upon for an impact evaluation of the main Diamond Reforms.

#### *National Pupil Database datasets*

4.51 The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) is a mandatory census comprising pupil and school level data for all maintained schools. The data collection aims to ensure more accurate targeting of funding and to help the Welsh Government to develop and monitor policy.

#### *Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)*

4.52 The LLWR is a record of post-16 learners in Wales that is used for post-16 funding and planning, monitoring performance and strategic development. It provides the official source of statistics on post-16 (excluding HE) learners in Wales. The dataset contains a large range of variables and good demographic data which may enable the evaluation to identify specific target groups with relative ease. It will be a key source of information on learners prior to HE participation as well as those pursuing alternative routes to HE<sup>64</sup>.

#### *Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)*

4.53 HESA data includes information about students':

- personal characteristics
- place of study
- entry qualifications and socio-economic backgrounds
- courses and modules undertaken
- progression through HE and the qualifications achieved.

4.54 HESA collects graduate data on an annual basis, which is used by UK Governments and HE funding bodies in the regulation and funding of providers. Welsh Government uses HESA data for policy monitoring and development, including the monitoring and projection of student numbers, student support forecasting, policy development<sup>65</sup>, evaluation and Equality Impact Assessment, tracking graduate outcomes, Welsh language monitoring and linking to other educational data held by Welsh Government. HESA data

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<sup>64</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>65</sup> HESA data was used to forecast the affordability of recommendations in the Diamond Review.

is used to monitor where students are studying, including cross-border flows of HE students in the UK. Numbers of students from Wales studying in the UK, and all students studying in Wales, are monitored on an annual basis, according to variables including:

- year of study
- location of study
- domicile (e.g. Wales, England, EU, as well as lower geographies as required)
- Welsh language use in HE, particularly the numbers of students receiving some teaching through the medium of Welsh
- level of study (undergraduate or PG)
- mode of study (FT or PT)
- subject of study
- equality characteristics (e.g. age, disability, gender, ethnicity)
- real numbers involved and demographic information.

#### *The Millennium Cohort Study*

- 4.55 The Millennium Cohort Study is a research project following the lives of around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000-01. The project tracks Millennium children throughout their childhood through to their adult years. There have been six surveys undertaken to date at the following cohort ages: nine months and three, five, seven and fourteen years.
- 4.56 Topics covered include: parenting, childcare, school choice, child behaviour and cognitive development, child and parental health, parents' employment and education, income and poverty, housing, neighbourhood and residential mobility, and social capital and ethnicity. Only approximately 2% of this sample are Welsh-domiciled and participating in HE (around 400 individuals) and therefore caution should be taken in relying too heavily on this dataset<sup>66</sup>.

#### *Student Loans Company (SLC) grant and loan recipient data*

- 4.57 SLC data includes information about grants and loans received, household income, early withdrawal, completion status amount/proportion of debt repayment and employment status. The SLC also has a marker on those who

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<sup>66</sup> Stakeholder interviewee and stakeholder feedback in data workshop.

live at home or in student accommodation, which could be linked with Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation and family income data, also available from the SLC<sup>67</sup>.

#### *Student Income and Expenditure Survey*

4.58 The Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) provides evidence of the financial position of HE students in England and Wales. It was a mechanism for assessing the impact of changes to student funding and support that were introduced for those starting HE in the 2012/13 academic year (against a baseline captured in 2011/12). The size of the Welsh cohort on the SIES may require a boost in order to ensure it is sufficiently robust<sup>68</sup>. There is also an opportunity to link SIES data with HESA data, to identify relationships between perceptions of financial circumstances and part-time employment activities with retention and completion <sup>69</sup>.

#### *Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO)*

4.59 The LEO dataset links data from a range of sources of information about FT and PT bachelor's degree students<sup>70</sup>, to chart the transition of graduates from HE into the workplace. LEO demonstrates how much graduates of different courses (grouped by JACS<sup>71</sup>) at different universities are earning at the time of publication, either one, three, five, or ten years after graduating<sup>72</sup>. The data can also be broken down by graduate characteristics including gender, ethnicity, geographic region (at application date), age (when commencing study), prior school attainment, courses taken, and qualifications achieved, employment and income and benefits claimed.

4.60 The LEO dataset combines data from existing administrative sources including:

- National Pupil Database
- HESA
- Individual Learner Record Data / Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)
- HMRC, and

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<sup>67</sup> Stakeholder interviewee.

<sup>68</sup> Feedback from stakeholders and stakeholder feedback in data workshop.

<sup>69</sup> Stakeholder feedback in data workshop

<sup>70</sup> Including study leavers who did not graduate with a degree

<sup>71</sup> Joint Academic Classification of Subjects

<sup>72</sup> The earliest data so far released has been 2003-04 graduates, the only cohort for which there is ten-year-long data.

- Department for Work and Pensions.

4.61 There are however some issues with what the LEO includes and does not include, which potentially undermine its validity in terms of evaluating the impact of the main Diamond Reforms, namely:

- The LEO does not include household income on entry to HE or take up of student loans.
- The dataset only includes those who have taken a university route, and therefore outcomes cannot be compared with those who take an alternative route (for example, an Apprenticeship or entrepreneurial activity).
- The LEO dataset is not comprehensive, and for some institutions and subjects there are significant gaps in the data, particularly in relation to salaries<sup>73</sup>.
- Limitations on the reliability of the earnings data, given the changes to the economic and political climate over such a long period and the fact the data is not adjusted for inflation, which further complicates year-on-year comparisons.
- PAYE data showing start and end date of an employee's time working, which can often be inaccurate.

*Other potential sources of secondary data*

Additional data sources that could be included in the evaluation of the reforms include:

- Annual population survey data
- Labour Force Survey
- National Destinations of Leavers Survey
- NUS Pound in your Pocket Survey
- Reaching Wider Survey
- Beaufort Omnibus Survey
- WISERD Education Multi Cohort Study
- SAIL
- HEFCW Graduation Survey
- UCAS data
- Careers Wales data

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<sup>73</sup> This may be due to graduates leaving the UK, becoming self-employed or voluntarily leaving the labour force.

- ADRC.

### **Final proposals for impact evaluation**

- 4.62 The section immediately above outlines the main existing data sources that could be used as measures for an impact evaluation of the reforms.
- 4.63 Secondary data alone will not however provide the necessary evidence to evaluate the impact of the reforms, and additional primary research will be required, in order to understand the causal links between the student finance reforms and the actions of each of the stakeholders affected by the reforms, including actual and prospective HE students.
- 4.64 The ten-year evaluation programme should comprise three stages:
- Preparation phase (2019-2021)
  - Mid-term evaluation phase (2022-2023)
  - Final impact evaluation phase (2027-2029)
- 4.65 The work involved in each stage of the evaluation is summarised below.

#### *Preparation phase*

- 4.66 The preparation phase should focus on ensuring that systems for generating and using information are developed and supported, such that mid-term and final impact evaluations are based on robust evidence. It should also involve qualitative primary (baseline) research, in the form of a longitudinal, three-wave qualitative survey of Welsh-domiciled HE students. The majority of the work could be carried out within Welsh Government, although primary research would need to be commissioned.

#### *Mid-term evaluation phase*

- 4.67 The mid-term evaluation should concentrate on measuring outputs and emerging outcomes, in terms of:
- Improved financial position for HE students (FT and PT undergraduate and PG).
  - Increased HE enrolment<sup>74</sup>, retention<sup>75</sup> and completion<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> PT undergraduate and postgraduate only.

<sup>75</sup> FT and PT undergraduate and post-graduate.

<sup>76</sup> FT and PT undergraduate and post-graduate.

- Increased representation of low participation groups in HE.
  - Increase in individuals' student loan debt.
  - Reduction in the impact of financial pressure on student wellbeing.
  - Increase in allocation of finance to other HE priorities.
- 4.68 The mid-term evaluation should involve the analysis of key secondary data sources, including 2020/21 SIES, linked to HESA student record, PLASC, WED, LLWR, SLC grant and loan recipient data and WIMD, annual SLA and HESA statistics (2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24), Follow-up Pound In Your Pocket survey (if applicable) and Graduate Outcomes survey.
- 4.69 In addition, and in order to track the experiences of HE students (including some PG students who would have been undergraduates after the reforms came in) this phase should also include a second cohort for a longitudinal qualitative study of Welsh-domiciled students who enrolled in Autumn 2022 in Welsh and English institutions, for the purpose of tracking their HE experiences up to the end of the 2024-25 academic year.

*Final impact evaluation phase*

- 4.70 The final impact evaluation should draw on all the evidence gathered through the preparation and mid-term evaluation phases, along with additional primary research. It should look to measure outcomes and emerging impact, including:
- Improvement in education and qualification levels and therefore individual earning capacity.
  - Improvement in individual health and wellbeing.
  - Increased rate of higher-level skills and qualifications of the Welsh workforce.
  - More affordable funding system for Welsh Government/HEFCW
  - Strengthened financial position of HEIs.
- 4.71 The analytical and research requirements for the final impact evaluation phase include analysis of the same data sources used in the mid-term evaluation, along with a third and final cohort of students for a longitudinal study of Welsh-domiciled HE students. In addition, for the purpose of international and historical comparison, the final phase should include analysis of HESA data (Wales domiciled students compared with England domiciled students and changes over time amongst Wales domiciled students, pre- and post-Diamond

reforms). Finally, this phase should include an analysis of the quarterly Labour Force Survey results (2018-2029) in order to establish any changes in the rate of higher-level skills and qualifications of the Welsh workforce

- 4.72 The table below maps out each element of the work involved in the preparation stage, along with proposed timescales, responsibilities and the nature of any costs<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Please note, due to the extended timescales for this evaluation and the uncertainties about the impact of Brexit and other unforeseen factors, along with the undisclosed costs of existing data collection processes, costs have not been given a numeric value.

Preparation Stage (2019-2021)				
Required output/ outcome/impact measure	Activity	Timescales	Responsibility	Cost
<p>Improved financial position of FT/PT undergraduate and PG students<sup>78</sup>.</p> <p>Reduction in the impact of finance as a barrier to HE enrolment, retention, completion<sup>79</sup>.</p>	<p>Plan and design the 2020-2021 SIES and explore the following enhancements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boosted samples for Welsh-domiciled students as a whole.</li> <li>• Boosted samples for priority groups including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ parent/carer students</li> <li>○ part-time students</li> <li>○ care leavers</li> <li>○ BME students</li> <li>○ students with disability</li> <li>○ Welsh speaking students.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Inclusion of postgraduate students.</li> <li>• Inclusion of questions about financial hardship and consequent risk to retention.</li> <li>• Inclusion of questions relating specifically to the student finance support available to them and the degree to which this influenced their decision to apply to university.</li> <li>• Inclusion of qualitative follow-up study on financial hardship and risk, to be carried out with Welsh-domiciled students</li> </ul>	Spring 2019-Spring 2020	Welsh Government in partnership with DfE	Existing planned costs for SEIS, with additional costs for sample boosts and qualitative study.

<sup>78</sup> Preparation for this outcome measure.

<sup>79</sup> Preparation for this outcome measure.

	<p>studying at each HEI in Wales and Welsh-domiciled students in one London-based university and one other UK university (i.e.: in neither Wales nor London)<sup>80</sup>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing respondent consent to link their SIES responses to specific administrative data sources<sup>81</sup> to enable future useful research<sup>82</sup>.</li> <li>• Plan for the development of an approach to propensity score matching English- and Welsh-domiciled student data from 2020/21 SEIS, and propensity score matching Welsh-domiciled student data from 2020/21 SEIS and Welsh-domiciled student data from 2014/15 SEIS<sup>83</sup>, for the purpose of assessing the counterfactual.</li> </ul>			
<p>Increase in the proportion of students remaining on and completing FT undergraduate courses<sup>84</sup>.</p> <p>Increase in enrolment,</p>	<p>In preparation for the 2020/21 SIES, work with Welsh Government statisticians, HESA and SLC to enable the linkage of SEIS responses to the following data sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'National Pupil Database' datasets (PLASC and WED)<sup>87</sup></li> <li>• Lifelong Learning Wales Record<sup>88</sup></li> <li>• HESA student record<sup>89</sup></li> <li>• SLC grant and loan recipient data<sup>90</sup>.</li> </ul>	<p>Spring 2019-Spring 2020</p>	<p>Welsh Government and HESA</p>	<p>No substantial additional cost for data linkage.</p>

<sup>80</sup> We recommend that this study is first carried out in 2019-2020 to ensure it includes a sample of those students studying with pre-Diamond Reform student support (as a baseline) and those affected by the Diamond Reforms.

<sup>81</sup> Specifically, HESA, PLASC, WED, HESA student record, SLC grant and loan recipient data and HMRC records.

<sup>82</sup> This will include working with the DfE to explore opportunities for securing English-domiciled respondent consent for link SEIS responses to English administrative data sources, to enable a richer level of propensity score matching.

<sup>83</sup> Given the proposed changes/additions to the questions for the 2020/21 SEIS, it will not be possible to compare all questions from the two surveys (2014/5 and 2020/21).

<sup>84</sup> Preparation for this outcome measure.

retention and completion of PT undergraduate courses and PG courses <sup>85</sup> .	Work with NUS to explore opportunity for and viability (in terms of costs and robustness of data) of a follow-up Pound In Your Pocket survey, with qualitative follow-up.	Spring 2019-Spring 2020	Welsh Government in partnership with SLC	Provisional costs for follow-up PIYP survey.
Increase in individuals' student loan debt <sup>86</sup> .	Building on HEFCW's widening participation target groups, agree a definition of 'low participation groups, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• geographic groups (i.e.: POLAR<sup>91</sup> quintile)</li> <li>• age groups</li> <li>• ethnic groups</li> <li>• school characteristics</li> <li>• household characteristics (income and parental experience of HE).</li> </ul>	Spring 2019-Spring 2020	Welsh Government	No additional cost envisaged.
Increased representation of low participation groups in HE.				
Reduction in the impact of finance as a barrier to	Commission a longitudinal qualitative study of Welsh-domiciled students, for two cohorts: the first cohort to be a sample of students	Spring 2019 – Summer 2021	Welsh Government and external supplier.	Cost of commissioning external study <sup>98</sup> .

<sup>87</sup> To provide evidence of educational characteristics and attainments.

<sup>88</sup> To provide evidence of educational characteristics and attainments.

<sup>89</sup> To demonstrate levels of higher education enrolment, retention and completion.

<sup>90</sup> To provide evidence of information about household income, grants and the loans received, early dropouts, amount/proportion of debt repayment and employment status.

<sup>85</sup> Preparation for this outcome measure.

<sup>86</sup> Preparation for this outcome measure.

<sup>91</sup> Participation Of Local Area.

<sup>98</sup> Given this study would be commissioned in the relatively near future, we would suggest it might cost in the region of £100K, based on a sample of 50 students at the outset (allowing for some degree of attrition over the three years).

<p>HE enrolment, retention, completion.</p> <p>Reduction in the impact of financial pressures on student wellbeing.</p>	<p>who enrolled in autumn 2018 in Welsh and English institutions (to be interviewed over three waves on an annual basis, starting from Spring/Summer 2019), and the second who enrolled in autumn 2017 (to be interviewed over two waves on an annual basis, starting from Spring/Summer 2019), for the purpose of tracking their HE experiences up to the end of the 2020-21 academic year<sup>92</sup>, and as a means of measuring differences in experiences to those participating in the 2018 cohort, referred to. Survey questions would explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' perceptions and experiences of their support package</li> <li>• Financial situation and impact on perceived mental health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Availability of disposable income to meet living<sup>93</sup>, education<sup>94</sup> and leisure costs<sup>95</sup>.</li> <li>• Impact of financial situation on lifestyle choices<sup>96</sup>.</li> <li>• Financial situation and influence on attitudes towards retention.</li> <li>• Financial situation and impact, levels of debt, reliance upon insecure forms of finance.</li> </ul>			
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<sup>92</sup> The cohort would be interviewed on an annual basis for the three years.

<sup>93</sup> For example, housing, food and drink, utilities and transport.

<sup>94</sup> For example, text books and journals, fieldtrips.

<sup>95</sup> For example, participation in university clubs and societies.

<sup>96</sup> For example, decisions to undertake paid work or participate in volunteering activities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial situation and influence on aspirations for post graduate study.</li> <li>• Financial situation and influence on expectations for future career/lifestyle aspirations.</li> </ul> <p>In order to include all of the groups affected by the main Diamond Reforms, the study sample should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PT and FT students on undergraduate courses and PG<sup>97</sup>.</li> <li>• School leavers (in relation to undergraduate), graduates (in relation to PG) and mature students (in relation to both undergraduate and PG).</li> <li>• English and Welsh speakers.</li> <li>• Students studying in Wales and outside of Wales, in a range of different institutions, including HE in FE and the Sutton Trust 30.</li> </ul>	Spring 2019 – Summer 2020	Welsh Government and external supplier	Cost of commissioning external study <sup>99</sup> .
An increase in awareness amongst	Publish a summary of findings from new questions on educational aspirations and barriers in the National Survey for Wales and consider	Autumn 2019	Welsh Government	Delivered internally within Welsh

<sup>97</sup> UG students in each cohort would be interviewed three times (once in each academic year). PG students would include both PT and FT students. Each wave would need to include additional PG study participants, to replace those graduating after the first (i.e.: those on FT PG courses) or second (i.e.: those on PT PG courses) wave.

<sup>99</sup> Given this study would be commissioned in the relatively near future, we would suggest it might cost in the region of £35K, based on a sample of 25 students at the outset (allowing for some degree of attrition over the three years).

students and parents of the financial support available for HE.	<p>the potential for a follow up survey and/or repeating the questions in future years<sup>100</sup>.</p> <p>Commission research with Key Stage 5 students and parents of Key Stage 5 students to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of awareness of financial support for HE students.</li> <li>• In what ways and to what extent the available support has influenced their aspirations to participate in HE or not.</li> <li>• What other factors influence this aspiration/decision<sup>101</sup>.</li> </ul>	Autumn 2020	Welsh Government and external supplier.	<p>Government, so no anticipated additional costs.</p> <p>Cost of commissioning external study<sup>102</sup>.</p>
	<p>Explore opportunities to purchase additional questions on the Beaufort Omnibus survey in relation to awareness of financial support for HE students amongst the general population.</p>	Autumn 2020	Welsh Government and Beaufort Research	<p>Cost of additional questions on omnibus survey.</p>
Increase in allocation of finance to other Welsh Government priorities for HE <sup>103</sup> .	Quantitative analysis of HESA Finance Record and Welsh Government funding to HEFCW to understand annual HEI income and expenditure.	Spring 2019-Spring 2020	Welsh Government	<p>Delivered internally within Welsh Government, so no anticipated</p>

<sup>100</sup> Stakeholders have suggested that whilst this will provide useful quantitative data on the levels of awareness, it will be very high level and will not provide insight into how this awareness affects aspiration to participate in HE and actual participation in HE.

<sup>101</sup> For the purpose of assessing the counterfactual.

<sup>102</sup> Given this research would be commissioned in the relatively near future, we would suggest it might cost in the region of £25-35K.

<sup>103</sup> Preparation for this outcome measure.

<p>Strengthened financial position of HEIs<sup>104</sup>.</p> <p>More affordable funding system for Welsh Government/HEFCW<sup>105</sup>.</p>	<p>Welsh Government to work with HEFCW to develop a qualitative approach to contextualising the quantitative data<sup>106</sup>.</p>	<p>Spring 2019-Spring 2020</p>	<p>Welsh Government, in partnership with HEFCW</p>	<p>additional costs.</p> <p>Delivered internally within Welsh Government, so no anticipated additional costs.</p>
<p>Improvement in education and qualification levels and therefore individual earning capacity.</p> <p>Improvement in individual health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Liaise with HESA to understand the intended methodology and questionnaire for the new Graduate Outcomes survey that is currently being implemented, to explore degree of comparability with Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education.</p>	<p>Spring 2019</p>	<p>Welsh Government, in partnership with HESA</p>	<p>No additional cost envisaged.</p>
<p>Mid-term evaluation phase (2022-24)</p>				

<sup>104</sup> Preparation for this impact measure.

<sup>105</sup> Preparation for this impact measure.

<sup>106</sup> This is likely to involve qualitative interviews with Welsh Government, HEFCW and HEIs.

Required output/ outcome/impact measure	Activity	Timescales	Responsibility	Cost
Improved financial position of FT/PT undergraduate and PG students	Analysis of the following datasets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2020/21 SIES, linked to HESA student record, PLASC, WED, LLWR, SLC grant and loan recipient data and WIMD.</li> <li>• Annual SLA statistics and HESA (2018/9, 2019/20, 2020/1, 2021/2, 2022/2, 2023/4)<sup>107</sup>.</li> </ul>	Spring 2022 – Summer 2024	Welsh Government	No additional cost envisaged for internal analysis of already budgeted surveys and data collection processes.
Reduction in the impact of finance as a barrier to HE enrolment, retention, completion  Increase in individuals' student loan debt.	Analysis of the following datasets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2020/21 SIES, linked to HESA student record, PLASC, WED<sup>108</sup>, LLWR, SLC grant and loan recipient data.</li> <li>• Follow-up Pound In Your Pocket survey (if applicable).</li> <li>• Graduate Outcomes survey.</li> </ul>	Summer 2022, Summer 2023 and Summer 2024	Welsh Government	No additional cost envisaged for internal analysis of already budgeted surveys and data collection processes. Cost of Pound In Your Pocket survey (if applicable)

<sup>107</sup> For analysis of the universe and for comparison with the six academic years prior to the main Diamond Reforms' implementation.

<sup>108</sup> Specifically, with links to year 11 and year 13 personal and study characteristics, including free school meals eligibility, instance of Additional Learning Needs and Key Stage 4 and 5 attainment.

<p>Reduction in the impact of financial pressures on student wellbeing</p>	<p>Commission a second a longitudinal qualitative study of Welsh-domiciled students who enrolled in Autumn 2022 in Welsh and English institutions (to be interviewed over three waves on an annual basis, starting from Spring/Summer 2023), for the purpose of tracking their HE experiences up to the end of the 2024-25 academic year, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand for student welfare services (and the extent to which financial situation is cited as factor influencing demand for services).</li> <li>• Financial situation and impact on mental health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• Availability of disposable income to meet living<sup>109</sup>, education<sup>110</sup> and leisure costs<sup>111</sup>.</li> <li>• Impact of financial situation on lifestyle choices<sup>112</sup>.</li> <li>• Financial situation and influence on attitudes towards retention.</li> <li>• Financial situation and impact, levels of debt, reliance upon insecure forms of finance.</li> </ul>	<p>Spring 2022 to summer 2024</p>	<p>Welsh Government and external supplier.</p>	<p>Cost of commissioning external study<sup>114</sup>.</p>
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<sup>109</sup> For example, housing, food and drink, utilities and transport.

<sup>110</sup> For example, text books and journals, fieldtrips.

<sup>111</sup> For example, participation in university clubs and societies.

<sup>112</sup> For example, decisions to undertake paid work or participate in volunteering activities.

<sup>114</sup> As with the first cohort, we would recommend a sample of 50 at the outset. Costs could vary between £110K and £130K.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial situation and influence on aspirations for post graduate study.</li> <li>• Financial situation and influence on expectations for future career/lifestyle aspirations.</li> </ul> <p>In order to include all of the groups affected by the main Diamond Reforms, the study sample should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PT and FT students on undergraduate courses and PG students.</li> <li>• School leavers (in relation to undergraduate), graduates (in relation to PG<sup>113</sup>) and mature students (in relation to both undergraduate and PG).</li> <li>• English and Welsh speakers.</li> <li>• Students studying in Wales and outside of Wales, in a range of different institutions, including HE in FE and the Sutton Trust 30.</li> </ul>			
<p>Increase in allocation of finance to other Welsh Government priorities for HE</p>	<p>Analysis of annual HEI income and expenditure (2018/9, 2019/20, 2020/1, 2021/2, 2022/2, 2023/4)<sup>115</sup>, via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative interviews with Welsh Government, HEFCW and all Welsh HEIs and sample of English HEIs.</li> <li>• Review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welsh Government budgets for HE</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Spring 2022 – Summer 2024</p>	<p>Welsh Government, provisionally with external supplier to conduct qualitative research.</p>	<p>Cost of commissioning qualitative research (provisionally)</p>

<sup>113</sup> For the second wave, this would include graduates who started HE after the implementation of the Diamond reforms.

<sup>115</sup> For comparison with previous years.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Annual Remit Letters setting out Welsh Government’s allocation to HEFCW by financial year.</li> <li>○ HEFCW’s annual funding circulars setting for awards by academic year.</li> <li>○ HEFCW financial health reports.</li> </ul>			
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Final impact evaluation phase (2026-29)

Required output/ outcome/impact measure	Activity	Timescales	Responsibility	Cost
Improvement in education and qualification levels and therefore individual earning capacity	<p>Analysis of the following datasets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsequent SIES<sup>116</sup>, linked to HESA student record, PLASC, WED, LLWR, SLC grant and loan recipient data and WIMD.</li> <li>• Annual SLA statistics and HESA (2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/8, 2028/9)<sup>117</sup></li> <li>• Graduate Outcomes survey</li> <li>• (Historic) NPD, to investigate characteristics of those who did and who did not go to university pre-Diamond and who went and did not go post Diamond reforms.</li> </ul>	2026-29	Welsh Government	SIES (Not currently planned)

<sup>116</sup> For example, in 2025, five years after the previous survey.

<sup>117</sup> For analysis of the universe and for comparison with previous years.

Improvement in individual health and wellbeing	Commission a third longitudinal qualitative study of Welsh-domiciled students who enrolled in Autumn 2026 in Welsh and English institutions, for the purpose of tracking their HE experiences up to the end of the 2028-29 academic year.	2026-29	Welsh Government and external supplier.	Cost of commissioning external study.
Increased rate of higher-level skills and qualifications of the Welsh workforce	Analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HESA data (Wales domiciled students vs England domiciled students and change over time in Wales domiciled students)</li> <li>• Quarterly Labour Force Survey results (2018-2029)</li> </ul>	Spring 2026-29	Welsh Government	No additional cost envisaged
More affordable funding system for Welsh Government/HEFCW  Strengthened financial position of HEIs	Analysis of annual HEI income and expenditure (2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28, 2028/29) <sup>118</sup> , via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative interviews with Welsh Government, HEFCW and all Welsh HEIs and sample of English HEIs.</li> <li>• Review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welsh Government budgets for HE</li> <li>○ Annual Remit Letters setting out Welsh Government's allocation to HEFCW by financial year.</li> <li>○ HEFCW's annual funding circulars setting for awards by academic year.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Spring 2026-29	Welsh Government, provisionally with external supplier to conduct qualitative research	No additional cost for in-house analysis.  Cost of commissioning qualitative research (provisionally)

<sup>118</sup> For comparison with previous years.

	○ HEFCW financial health reports.			
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## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 This peer review process has set out to critically appraise and develop the outline high-level logic model, evaluability assessment and evaluation plan developed by Welsh Government.
- 5.2 It has brought together the views of a range of stakeholders with different expertise and knowledge of the HE sector and varying levels of understanding of evaluation theory and practice. The review has also considered the various data sources that could be used as measures for an impact evaluation of the main Diamond reforms, including sample surveys, routine (and census) school, FE, HE and HMRC data, longitudinal studies and linked datasets.
- 5.3 It is essential to adopt a long-term and planned approach to this evaluation, using both historic and longitudinal data, as described in the approach above.
- 5.4 Nonetheless, these data sources alone will not provide the necessary evidence to evaluate the impact of the reforms and additional primary research will be required. Previous studies have shown that the factors influencing people's decisions to participate in HE or not are complex and it will be critical to explore the links between financial support available to potential students, the choices that they make and medium- and longer-term impacts this has on their wellbeing. This can only be achieved through dedicated research.
- 5.5 Given the objective of the reforms to widen access to HE, it will also be important for the evaluation to determine how the financial support available under the Diamond reforms influences a potential student's decision to consider HE. This would require retrospective analysis of secondary data relating to both those who do and those who do not participate in HE, both before and after the Diamond reforms came in.
- 5.6 The causal links suggested between the content of the Diamond reforms and measured outcomes should not be exaggerated, given that there are a range of external factors that might mitigate or augment any impact of the reforms. The reforms are being introduced during a period in which considerable socio-economic change is anticipated resulting from a potential Brexit, changes to student funding arrangements in England, a demographic decline in the number of school leavers and changes to the PCET sector overall, including ambitions to create greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational

routes. These factors coupled with a range of other externalities impacting on people's decision to participate in HE or not will prove a challenge for a meaningful and robust impact evaluation of the reforms.

- 5.7 Recommendation 1: Fully implement and further refine the evaluation approach developed through the peer review process and set out in this report, allowing for adjustments to be made to take into account relevant policy changes in Wales and England.
- 5.8 Recommendation 2: Commission a three-phase longitudinal qualitative study of three cohorts of Welsh-domiciled students as part of each phase of the evaluation, enrolled in Welsh and English institutions, specifically:
- The preparation phase cohort<sup>119</sup> of the study would be interviewed for the first time in spring/summer 2019, for the second time in spring/summer 2020 and for the third time in spring/summer 2021.
  - The mid-term evaluation phase cohort of the study would be interviewed for the first time in spring/summer 2022, for the second time in spring/summer 2023 and for the third time in spring/summer 2024.
  - The final impact evaluation cohort of the study would be interviewed for the first time in spring/summer 2027, for the second time in spring/summer 2028 and for the third time in spring/summer 2029.
- 5.9 Recommendation 3: Commission a qualitative study as part of the preparation phase with students in Key Stage 5 (including those in school and FE institutions) and their parents to understand aspirations, barriers and motivations in relation to participation in HE.
- 5.10 Recommendation 4: Explore opportunities to purchase additional questions on the Beaufort Omnibus survey in relation to awareness of financial support for HE students amongst the general population.
- 5.11 Recommendation 5: Explore opportunities and data protection implications for linking LEO data for Welsh-domiciled students with SLC data on household income on entry to HE and student loan take-up.
- 5.12 Recommendation 6: Explore opportunities for comparing HE data sets for Welsh-domiciled students with HE data sets for English domiciled students.

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<sup>119</sup> For further details of the proposed composition of this cohort, please see Section 4 of this report.

## Annex 1 – Phased approach to the student support reforms

The phased approach to the reforms is as follows;

### *Recommendations accepted, with proposed implementation 2017/2018:*

- Welsh Government to ask HEFCW to collect “basket of goods” cost information from Universities (with a view to publish)
- Commitment to Welsh medium provision,
- Look into future funding for Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (action to establish task group to review activities and relationship of the Coleg).

### *Recommendations implemented from 2018/19 onwards:*

- Focus of undergraduate support should be on improved maintenance support for full-time and part-time students,
- Welsh Government to ask HEFCW to explore how fee and access plans can be strengthened in line with WG policy - widening access and ensuring fair access to HE,
- Welsh Government to prepare legislation that provides Welsh- domiciled students beginning their course in 2018/19 eligibility for subsidised loans to meet full cost of fees wherever they study in the UK,
- Welsh Government to work with the Student Loans company to organise monthly payment system (implications to be discussed), consult on proposals for changes to full-time undergraduate tuition fee and maintenance support (changes in 2018/19), and ensure those leaving a care setting receive maximum level of maintenance grant from 2018/19.
- Prepare legislation on maintenance and tuition fee support proposals, request ideas on how to promote study at lower intensities, consult on part-time undergraduate tuition fee proposals, explore which subjects/priority areas can be added to the current list of exemptions for ELQs.
- Consult on our proposals for postgraduate support, introducing changes in 2018/19.  
Explore opportunities to regulate student numbers and the provision of higher cost courses to ensure the sustainability of this, ask HEFCW to consider how to manage the provision of payments to reflect the cost of teaching more expensive subjects.

- Give further consideration to a support system for students choosing to study outside of the UK (considering the impact of Brexit), evaluate the designation of HE courses and how institutions are regulated in terms of quality and financial management, run a pilot scheme to explore the practicalities if extending the student support package beyond UK and EU.
- Accept the need for HE institutions to report their use of QR funding.

*Recommendations accepted for future implementation:*

- Recommendation on incentives for graduates - incentivise students to stay in Wales after they graduate,
- Recommendations on targeted support (for students with extra responsibilities etc) - prepare legislation for students who have been carers to have maximum maintenance grant, working group to consider disabled students' allowance (DSA), consider further assistance to students who are carers and how they can combine their study with caring responsibilities.
- Recommendations on postgraduate research funding - look into a 'Welsh Postgraduate Research Scholarship Scheme' and the recommendations of how it should be instituted.
- Recommendation on intergovernmental relations and the Student Loans Company - request regular ministerial meetings to discuss policy developments and delivery of student finance reforms, develop alternative commissioning arrangements to ensure WG is able to implement policy reforms in a timely manner, scoping alternatives to the Student Loans Company for the delivery of Student Finance Wales.
- Recommendations on higher vocational and technical education - need to increase higher level apprenticeship programmes, ask HEFCW to develop investment in higher level apprenticeships.

*Recommendations that will be considered:*

- Recommendation that Learned Society Wales (LSW) should receive funding of £1m per annum,
- Recommendation that HEFCW should have an amount of undesignated funds to drive change in areas associated with WG priorities.

*Rejected recommendations:*

- Higher Cost Postgraduate taught subjects,
- Higher vocational and technical education

*Recommendation that has been noted:*

- A review into the WG's support for University of Wales Press - develop a sustainable business plan for UWP.

## Annex 2 – Documentation and Potential Data Source list

### Document list

- [The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student finance Arrangements in Wales](#)
- [Prosperity For All Agenda, 2017](#)
- [Well-being of Future Generations Act, 2015](#)
- [Towards 2030: A framework for building a world-class post-compulsory education system for Wales](#)
- [Welsh Government response to the recommendations from the Review of Student Support and Higher Education Funding in Wales](#) ('The Diamond Review') -
- The formative and impact evaluation of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (2018)
- Evaluation of the Financial Contingency Fund (2013)
- Evaluation of financial support for students in Further Education in Wales (2015)
- Evaluation of the Education Maintenance Allowance (2014)
- Evaluation of the Assembly Learning Grant (2015)
- Fair and flexible funding: A Welsh model to promote quality and access in higher education (The Rees Review) (2005)
- Graduate Indebtedness: Its perceived effects on behaviour and life choices - Literature Review (2018)
- Socio-economic disadvantage and experience in higher education (2003)

### Potential Data Source List

- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
- National Pupil Database datasets – PLASC and WED
- Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO)
- Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)
- Student Loans Company (SLC) – Grant and loan recipient data
- Student Income and Expenditure Survey
- National Student Money Survey
- National Survey for Wales
- Annual population survey data
- Employer Skills Survey

- Employer Perspectives Survey
- Labour Force Survey
- National Destinations of Leavers Survey
- NUS Pound in your Pocket Survey
- Reaching Wider Survey
- Beaufort Omnibus Survey
- WISERD Education Multi Cohort Study
- Millennium Cohort Study
- SAIL
- HEFCW Graduation Survey
- UCAS data
- Careers Wales data - through ADRC
- Skills and Employment Survey
- National Student Survey

## Annex 3 – Participant List

- Cardiff University
  - Chris Taylor - Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD)
  - WISERD representative
  - WISERD/Administrative Data Research Centre representatives (x2)
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- Lucy Blackburn – Former head of Higher Education Scottish Government
- National Union of Students (NUS)
- Sheffield Hallam University
  - Colin McCaig
- Swansea University
  - Secure Anonymised Information Linkage/ADRC representative
- The Open University
- Universities Wales
- Welsh Government
  - Chris Williams
  - Geoff Owen
  - Additional representatives (x5)

## **Annex 4 – Research materials**

# **Expert peer review of Welsh Government proposals for evaluation of student support reforms**

## **Stakeholder scoping interview topic guide**

This topic guide is intended to be used for interviews with academics and policy leads specialising in higher education.

The purpose of these interviews is two-fold:

- Part 1: to discuss any examples of evaluation of student finance reform or other broadly comparative policy reform, including:
  - Evaluation methodologies
  - Data sources and timescales
  - Issues and challenges
- Part 2: to sense check and suggest areas for improvement on the draft logic model and evaluation approach.

Miller Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to critically appraise and review the proposed approach to evaluation of the Welsh Government's main student support reforms, to recommend improvements and to propose a way forward. Through these initial scoping interviews, Miller Research is consulting with a range of academic and public sector stakeholders.

Stakeholders will be sent the revised, diagrammatic logic model and evaluation approach (including the following annexes: the draft high level logic model, evaluability assessment and draft evaluation plan) in advance of the interview, for review and appraisal.

### **Confidentiality:**

Stakeholders will be assured that anything said during the interview will be treated in complete confidence. Where direct quotes are used they will be sufficiently anonymised to ensure that they cannot be attributed to any one individual, or we will ask for their consent to be quoted.

Stakeholders will also be asked to confirm that they are happy for their name and/or organisation to be listed as participants in the peer review process.

Interviewees will be assured that this research is being carried out in accordance with Market Research Society guidelines, which are in place to promote professionalism in the conduct of market, social and opinion research.

<b>Interviewee</b>	
<b>Role/organisation</b>	
<b>Time/date</b>	
<b>Interviewer</b>	

### **Part One: examples of other evaluations**

1. Please could you briefly outline your involvement in any previous activities assessing the impact or potential impact of student finance reforms or of other relevant policy reforms?
2. What methodologies were employed for the evaluation? *Probe for balance between primary and secondary, quantitative and qualitative approaches, use of evaluability assessment and how the assessment results were used.*
3. What data sources were used for the evaluation? *Probe for baseline measures, use of a control group/measures of the counterfactual.*
4. What were the overall timescales for the evaluation? How did these relate to the implementation of the reforms/new policy? With hindsight, were these timescales appropriate?
5. What were the main issues and challenges for the evaluation? *Prompt if necessary, a lack of valid and reliable indicators, flaws in the theory of change etc.*

### **Part 2: Review and assessment of draft logic model and evaluation approach**

*Please note that the focus of this review is upon critiquing Welsh Government’s plans to evaluate the impact of the reforms. Offer participants the option of receiving the questions in an email and submitting responses in written form, to enable them to read the questions alongside the materials.*

*Not all stakeholders will be in a position to answer all questions.*

6. To what extent does the diagrammatic logic model set out the relevant inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts of the student support reforms? Please explain your answer. *NB: summarise the key element of the model if necessary.*
7. To what extent does the logic model appropriately elucidate the assumptions between the inputs and the impacts of the reforms? Please explain your answer.
8. Is there anything missing from this model?
9. To what extent are current sources of data able to provide the necessary evidence for the proposed evaluation programme? What other sources of data may be required?
10. To what extent will the proposed evaluation approach enable Welsh Government to draw valid and meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness and the positive and negative impacts of the student support reforms?
11. What, if any, changes would you make to the proposed approach?

**Thank you for your time.**

# **Expert peer review of Welsh Government proposals for evaluation of student support reforms**

## **Data Workshop Agenda**

**25/09/2018 12:00-13:30**

**Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Meeting room 4.27**

Miller Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to critically appraise and review the proposed approach to evaluation of the Welsh Government's main student support reforms, to recommend improvements and to propose a way forward.

As part of the peer review, Miller Research is consulting with a range of academic and public sector stakeholders. This workshop will be a chance for the Miller Research team to meet with academics and data experts in Welsh Government to discuss access to and potential use of a variety of data sources.

### **Confidentiality**

Stakeholders will be assured that anything said during the workshop will be treated in complete confidence. Where direct quotes are used they will be sufficiently anonymised to ensure that they cannot be attributed to any one individual, or we will ask for their consent to be quoted.

Stakeholders will also be asked to confirm that they are happy for their name and/or organisation to be listed as participants in the peer review process.

Workshop attendees will be assured that this research is being carried out in accordance with Market Research Society guidelines, which are in place to promote professionalism in the conduct of market, social and opinion research.

### **Agenda**

1. Introductions and welcome
2. Overview of the diagrammatic logic model
3. Overview of proposed data sources
4. Collective review of the relevance, validity, robustness and completeness of the data sources
5. Collective review of the outcomes and impacts in the diagrammatic logic model and suitability of the data sources to measure relevant indicators
6. Other considerations – counterfactual and causality
7. Close

## Annex 5 - Welsh Government Evaluation Framework

Sources of evidence at short, medium and long term implementation points.				
Output, outcome and impact factors to measure	Baseline (pre-reform) measures available	Availability of data in short term (2years after reforms begin, i.e. AY 3 2020/21)	Availability of data in medium term - years 3,4,5 (AY 2021/2 - 2023/24)	Availability of data in long term - years 6-10 (2025/6-2029/30)
<b>Outputs</b>				
<b>Students and potential students</b>				
<b>Improved maintenance support</b>	2014/15 Student income and expenditure survey - income data	2019/20 SIES is beginning to be planned. Results should begin to be available in 2021.	Future SIES surveys	Future SIES surveys
	Annual statistics derived from SLA data on student income and finance	Annual SLA stats will continue to be available.	Annual SLA stats will continue to be available.	Annual SLA stats will continue to be available.
<b>Improved financial position of students</b>	SIES - levels of insecure debt (overdraft, arrears, credit)	2019/20 SIES is beginning to be planned. Results should begin to be available in 2021.	Future SIES surveys	Future SIES surveys
	NUS pound in your pocket survey (Wales HEIs only) - students at risk of quitting due to financial pressure	2019/20 SIES - hope to include questions on student perception of their financial position and risk of quitting due to financial pressure (results will not be directly comparable with NUS findings)		
<b>Improved enrolment, on HE courses, particularly PT and/or PG and amongst lower participation groups</b>	HESA data available annually. Analysis of data by social group is limited to POLAR quintiles. WISERD widening access study is now out of date - based on students entering HE in 2010/11 or earlier. Data are available to establish a baseline for a range of student HEFCW uses HESA data to assess the performance of HEIs in Wales in Widening Access and towards other goals, but these focus on the institutions and not Welsh domiciled students.	Data are available, but analysis to be limited to looking at enrolment patterns amongst POLAR quintiles in the short term	Matching and analysis of administrative data looking at (potential) students and their study characteristics The above work should be done in two phases. The medium term phase would focus on changes in enrolment patterns	The long term phase would focus on changes in enrolment, retention and completion patterns.
		[Need to add some detail about what data might be made available and when]		
<b>Reduction in the impact of finance as a barrier to HE enrolment, retention, completion</b>	2018/19 National survey for Wales questions on barriers and plans for study of a sample of Welsh residents - data to be available in late 2019.	2019 NSW results will be available	WG is currently planning to repeat the NSW questions three -yearly, so there should be new results in late 2022	A further 3 year repeat will mean further data available in late 2025
	decisions	2019/20 SIES. Results should begin to be available in 2021.	Future SIES surveys	Future SIES surveys
<b>Reduction in the impact of financial pressures on student wellbeing</b>	Not much information available. Possibilities are: Explore NUS pound in your pocket findings and other surveys (e.g. National Student Money Survey) for robustness and relevant findings. Retrospective qualitative research at the short term stage amongst student advisors	2019/20 SIES - qualitative follow up study. Results should begin to be available in 2021.	Future SIES surveys	Future SIES surveys
<b>HEIs</b>				
<b>Increase HEIs income from fees</b>	WG budget information on HEIs student fee income - annual	WG budget information on HEIs student fee income - annual	WG budget information on HEIs student fee income - annual	WG budget information on HEIs student fee income - annual
<b>Strengthen the financial position of Wales' HE providers</b>	HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual	HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual	HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual	HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual

<b>WG's other HE/Post-16 priorities</b>				
<b>Increase allocation to other HE and FE priorities</b>	Need more information on what the other priorities are. It should be possible to collect details about priorities from senior managers, and expenditure from HE finance data now and in the future.	See notes in baseline column	See notes in baseline column	See notes in baseline column
<b>Impacts</b>				
<b>Improvement in labour force education and qualification levels, which should lead to health, wellbeing and economic growth benefits.</b>	Annual population survey data	APS data	APS data	APS data
<b>Increase the rate of higher level skills and qualifications amongst Wales' labour force</b>	Employer Skills Survey 2015, Employer perspectives survey 2016	Employer perspectives survey 2019, Employer Skills Survey 2020	Not clear what ESS and ESP future plans are, but if they discontinue, there is likely to be some sort of successor survey.	Not clear what ESS and ESP future plans are, but if they discontinue, there is likely to be some sort of successor survey.
<b>Funding system is affordable and allows Wales' institutions to remain financially viable.</b>	WG expenditure on student support - we have this data HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual	WG expenditure on student support - we have this data HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual Stakeholder and HEI views about financial sustainability and viability - survey methods	WG expenditure on student support - we have this data HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual Stakeholder and HEI views about financial sustainability and viability - to be sought through interview	WG expenditure on student support - we have this data HESA data and HEI returns to HEFCW on their finances - annual Stakeholder and HEI views about financial sustainability and viability - to be sought through interview

		short-term evaluation stage	medium-term evaluation stage	long-term evaluation stage
<b>In house tasks</b>	Continue development of the use of key administrative data sources. <u>The data matching for KS5 leavers and destinations analysis, done by Rachel Lloyd's team is the key dataset to build on this - not sure whether this has been planned for the future.</u>			
	Publish summary of NSW findings. Conduct follow up survey amongst HE aspirationalists about barriers?	Report on NSW follow up survey of HE aspirationalists.	Depending on NSW questions being repeated, there should be an update available in 2022/23	
	Keep abreast of HE research and evaluation about widening access and what works across the UK,			
	Develop relationships with organisations conducting surveys amongst students in order to influence and exploit these as sources of data. - Keep abreast of results from surveys - especially HESA surveys of HE leavers' barriers to study, a and SLC customer satisfaction surveys. - Seek consent from respondents to link to administrative data sources where possible. - seek to quality assure survey work where there are quality questions			
	Develop next SIES jointly with DfE. A survey in 2020/21 might be better than 2019/20, as this would capture three years of student cohort after the 2018/19 reforms come into place. Developments could include: - consent from respondents to link with other datasets - sample boosts for part time students, students with childcare responsibilities, - additional questions about adverse childhood experiences	A piece of work investigating changes to attitudes towards debt amongst prospective students would be useful here. SLC customer satisfaction survey will be useful. We need to investigate which other surveys we can exploit to help us find out about this.		

Commissioned work		A rapid evidence assessment task could be conducted in-house to draw together the results of research exercises across the UK into behaviour, barriers and attitudes (this could be commissioned if in-house resources don't allow).	Interim evaluation study w in 2022/3. For FTUG, focus on analysis of matched datasets for 2012-2018 regime (year 11 cohorts in 2009/10-2014/15 ) and compare enrolment and retention and completion patterns with y11s in 15/16-17/18 (FTUS year 3 in 22/23 PT and PG student characteristics will be more problematic.	Commission long range impact evaluation study in . Final decision as to questions and approach to be decided later on, and will depend on concerns and priorities at the time. but possibilities are: - Synthesise findings from our own surveys. -include commissioned (matching and) analysis of compiled administrative datasets. (we can build on the interrim study by E,R,C measures for further cohorts - completing HE in - review of literature on widening access and results of surveys and other relevant studies. - Draw together evidence on workforce qualification levels from
		Costs associated with SIES will need to be paid in this year.	SIES results will be known this yeIN 2021/2. We will have potential to commission further analysis of SIES data and follow up qualitative study in time to inform an evaluation exercise in 2022/23	

## Annex 6 – Welsh Government Evaluability Assessment

1. <b>Project Design</b> (as described in a Theory of Change, Logical Framework or narrative)	<b>Notes</b>
<p><b>Clarity?</b></p>	<p>Are the long-term impact and outcomes clearly identified and are the proposed steps towards achieving these clearly defined?</p> <p>The principal and most financially significant reforms involve changes to full and part time undergraduate support, and financial support for postgraduate taught students.</p> <p>There are a number of further reforms which are scheduled for implementation in the short, medium or longer term. They relate to a wide variety of issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support for overseas undergraduate students,</li> <li>• incentives for graduates to work in Wales, support for disadvantaged students,</li> <li>• post graduate research students,</li> <li>• the student loans company,</li> <li>• vocational and technical education, and</li> <li>• funding to support and develop organisations and priorities which will further the WG agenda</li> </ul> <p>The policy approaches for these reforms are currently in the process of being detailed. Whilst the purposes of these reforms have been set out, the outcomes and impacts have not yet been clearly defined. For some of these further reforms, research and statistical work is under way, or planned, to inform policy approaches under consideration.</p> <p>The reforms, in general terms, aim to achieve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving support for students away from fee support, towards improved maintenance support.</li> <li>• removing financial barriers to HE enrolment, retention and completion, especially for less well-represented groups</li> <li>• creating sustainable and stable financial system for HE, including the financial sustainability of institutions and the long-term capacity of WG budgets to support all WG priorities in relation to HE.</li> </ul> <p>To remain manageable, this evaluability assessment concerns only changes to full and part time undergraduate and postgraduate maintenance and tuition fee support, and the</p>

		<p>recommended tuition fee level.</p> <p>In relation to <b>maintenance support for full-time and part-time students</b>, outputs and outcomes are quite well defined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Output: increase maintenance support</li> <li>• Output: increase awareness amongst potential applicants about their financial options and the attractiveness of the student loan repayment arrangements.</li> <li>• Outcome: Widen access, retention, completion amongst all groups and narrow the gaps between lower participation groups</li> <li>• Outcome: Increase the proportion of people of all ages and backgrounds that participate in HE at UG and PG levels and UG in part-time mode.</li> <li>• Outcome: Reduce the impact of financial barriers upon access to, retention and completion in Higher Education</li> <li>• Outcome: Reduce the impact of financial pressure on student wellbeing</li> <li>• Outcome: Reduce the reliance by students upon expensive forms of finance – credit, overdrafts and arrears.</li> </ul> <p>(An inevitable negative outcome of the reforms is that student borrowing and net debt will increase. It is also likely that student expenditure will increase (there is strong historic evidence that as student income increases, so does their expenditure).</p> <p>In relation to <b>the removal of tuition fee grants and replacement with loans</b>, the level of clarity with which outcomes are defined is lower. Outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the funding available to deliver WG priorities outside student support – These priorities may change over time. Some of them will be reflected in the remit of HEFCW, which is refreshed every year, and may be attached to hypothecated grants. Other priorities may be delivered in different ways and may even be directed towards education priorities outside HE,</li> <li>• The student support reforms, taken as a whole, are designed to facilitate access and allow an increase in participation in HE by Welsh-domiciled students. It is therefore logical that the positive impact upon access, retention and completion by Welsh-domiciled students, of maintenance support reforms will outweigh any negative impact upon participation that results from replacing fee grant with fee</li> </ul>
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		<p>loan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To strengthen the financial position of HE providers - specifically to increase the amount of income from fees to HEIs in Wales.</li> </ul> <p>The impacts of the <b>suite of main student support and fee reforms</b> are less well defined and specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the proportion of the population qualified to level 4 or above – well defined</li> <li>• Create a funding system that remains affordable within WG budgets and allows HE institutions to remain financially viable.</li> <li>• Contribute to meeting the projected increase in economic and employer demand for higher level skills and qualifications in the labour market.</li> <li>• Through supporting a better qualified population, contribute to economic growth, improvements in health and wellbeing and social cohesion – less well defined.</li> </ul> <p><b>Theories of change</b></p> <p>The theories which link inputs (the finance offer) to outputs (the provision of financial support) and outcomes (continued enrolment, retention and completion; more sustainable HE funding model; more investment in other WG HE priorities, are:</p> <p>The enhanced maintenance support grant and loan offer will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Result in students feeling that HE study is more affordable than at present, and that an HE course is, on balance, a better investment, than they feel at present.</li> <li>• Reduce the impact of financial barriers and student means on student enrolment, retention and completion, and, controlling for other factors, increase potential students' propensity to enrol, reduce their propensity to drop out and increase their likelihood of course completion. It will do this by contributing to students developing the view that study is more affordable</li> <li>• These factors cause improved enrolment, retention and completion, especially amongst part time, postgraduate and lower income groups.</li> </ul>
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		<p>Evidence about the impact of potential debt on prospective students' behaviour is not abundant or recent. It is also sometimes conflicting. What there is indicates that fee increases do not impact on participation, where grants or loans are available to cover them. There is evidence of debt aversion, more prevalent amongst disadvantaged groups, due to the psychological burden that prospective debt inflicts on students. Higher debt aversion is inversely related to participation. Studies (again, not recent) have found that prospective students are less debt tolerant than current students and graduates. Recent studies indicate that the impact of debt aversion has reduced recently in the UK, as HE is an increasingly expected norm for all social groups and now regarded as essential to securing employment. However, debt aversion has decreased amongst the highest, and increased amongst lower social classes, and is much higher amongst students in FE compared to other settings. Debt aversion still contributes to lower HE participation by lower class students. – an effect found to be even stronger in 2015 than in 2002.</p> <p>The new maximum fee arrangements will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable HEIs to predict with more confidence their levels of income, which will result in a more secure financial environment for them.</li> </ul> <p>The reduced cost of student support to WG will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the costs of support begin to reduce (as the 2012-2018 regime is phased out, WG will spend freed resources on other HE priorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant?</b>	Is the project objective clearly relevant to the needs of the target group, as identified by	The objective of providing an increased amount of maintenance support in the future is clearly relevant to one target group: potential and, in the future, actual Welsh-domiciled students. There are a number of sub-groups of particular interest – part time students, lower

	<p>any form of situation analysis, baseline study, or other evidence and argument? Is the intended beneficiary group clearly identified?</p>	<p>participation groups, parents, care leavers etc. However, due to the future number of applicants not being predictable with any precision, it is not possible to clearly identify the main beneficiary group.</p> <p>There is some evidence<sup>120</sup> that low participation, poor retention and completion are associated with coming from a lower income family and not receiving state financial support.</p> <p>There are a number of other direct beneficiary groups of the student support and fee reforms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students from elsewhere in the EU – this group is also not well defined, due to the same factors as the Welsh-domiciled student group. Also, Brexit may result in WG being forced to vary the current offer to this group.</li> <li>• HE providers, and the staff they employ, whose jobs and working conditions depend on the financial stability of HEIs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Plausible?</b></p>	<p>Is there a continuous causal chain, connecting the intervening agency with the final impact of concern?</p> <p>Is it likely that the project objective could be achieved, given the planned interventions, within the project lifespan? Is there evidence from elsewhere that it could be achieved?</p>	<p>In relation to the desired outcomes of the reforms:</p> <p>The links between the reformed student support offer and the attraction of students are strong, but they are affected by a wide number of factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' perception of the advantages of higher education, to enhance their career prospects and experiences</li> <li>• Students' feelings about debt and their understanding of the costs of student life.</li> <li>• Macro-economic factors, including employment rates and the cost of living which influence study and career choices</li> <li>• The availability and effect of careers advice</li> <li>• The type and number of course places available</li> </ul> <p>The retention of and completion by students is also directly influenced by the support offer and</p>

<sup>120</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511111540/https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Literature-review-PDF.pdf>; [Pound in your pocket, Wales 2014](#)

		<p>by the macro-economic factors above, however, other factors too:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional study factors, such as the quality of teaching and the course offer</li> <li>• Students' sense of attachment and belonging during the HE experience</li> <li>• The local cost of living and participation</li> </ul> <p>In relation to the causal chain linking WG-supported fee levels and the financial sustainability of institutions, the links are again strong, but other factors are also important, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macro-economic factors</li> <li>• Other sources of funding – Research Councils and other research funders, including EU (which is likely to be impacted by Brexit)</li> <li>• Costs of services, utilities and raw materials.</li> </ul> <p>In relation to the desired impacts of the reforms, causal relationships are less clear.</p>
<p><b>Validity and reliability?</b></p>	<p>Are there <i>valid</i> indicators for each expected event (output, outcome and impact levels)? I.e. will they capture what is expected to happen? Are they <i>reliable</i> indicators? I.e. will observations by different observers find the same thing?</p>	<p>There are many valid indicators to measure outputs and outcomes in relation to student participation, retention and completion, and these can be monitored for different groups (equalities groups, funding support criteria groups (eg. different SEGs) to reveal how engagement and success vary by group.</p> <p>HESA is the main source of enrolment, retention and completion data. It is available at the individual student level. SLC data (completely separate to the HESA data) contains detailed information about student family income when used as award criteria.</p> <p>We also have reliable sources of sample survey evidence (e.g. the Student Income and Expenditure Survey) provides useful information at a Wales level about the financial position of all students (not just the state support they get). However, these surveys are infrequent and there is a long time-delay between survey and results.</p> <p>There is further survey evidence of the perceptions of students of their financial position, such as the NUS pound in your pocket survey. However, the methodological approach has not been quality assured to GSR standards.</p> <p>The desired effects of the reforms on the financial standing of institutions are to increase their stability and viability. (not sure how we are going to monitor progress in this respect with any</p>

		<p>reliability or validity).</p> <p>By identified outcome, <b>potential sources of measurement</b> are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Output: increase maintenance support– <b>SLC data.</b></li> <li>• Output – increased awareness of offer/perceived attractiveness of repayment arrangements – <b>SLC customer satisfaction survey/National Survey for Wales questions about aspirations and barriers.</b></li> <li>• Outcome: Widen access, retention, completion amongst all groups and narrow the gaps between lower participation groups – <b>HESA data. Analysis of matched HESA and student characteristics data from other sources.</b></li> <li>• Outcome: Increase the proportion of people of all ages and backgrounds that participate in HE at UG and PG levels and UG in part-time mode. <b>As for previous point, to include population projections by age group.</b></li> <li>• Outcome: Reduce the impact of financial barriers upon access to, retention and completion in Higher Education. – we don't have regular evidence systems for this. <b>Past and planned surveys would be the only source.</b></li> <li>• Outcome: Reduce the impact of financial pressure on student wellbeing – we don't have regular evidence systems for this. <b>Past and planned surveys would be the only source.</b></li> </ul> <p>In relation to the removal of tuition fee grants and replacement with loans, the level of clarity with which outcomes are defined is lower. Outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the funding available to deliver WG priorities outside student support – These priorities may change over time. Some of them will be reflected in the remit of HEFCW, which is refreshed every year, and may be attached to hypothecated or other funding. Other priorities may be delivered in different ways and may even be directed towards education priorities outside HE. – <b>details of the spend by WG/HEFCW on different HE priorities, year by year would provide evidence for this, and would be available internally.</b></li> <li>• The student support reforms, taken as a whole, are designed to facilitate access and allow an increase in participation in HE by Welsh-domiciled students. It is therefore logical that the positive impact upon access, retention and completion of maintenance support reforms will outweigh any negative impact upon participation by replacing fee grant with fee loan. – Measuring impact of replacing the fee grant with loan is likely to be necessary. Again, we don't have regular evidence systems</li> </ul>
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		<p>for this. <b>Past and planned surveys would be the only source, and would need to distinguish students for whom only the fee offer has changed (I.e. for whom the maintenance offer has changed very little/not changed.)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To strengthen the financial position of HE providers - it is not clear what this means. The oversight of the financial position of institutions is a responsibility of HEFCW, however, and WG has a limited role in monitoring it. <b>[We need advice as to how this should be monitored. It is currently HEFCWs responsibility to oversee HEI financial health]</b></li> </ul> <p>Some of the impacts are less well defined and specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the proportion of the population qualified to level 4 or above – <b>this is monitored via the Adult Population Survey <a href="http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/levels-highest-qualification-held-working-age-adults/?lang=en">http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/levels-highest-qualification-held-working-age-adults/?lang=en</a></b></li> <li>• Create a funding system that. remains affordable within WG budgets and allows HE providers to remain financially viable) <b>[We need advice as to how this should be monitored. It is currently HEFCWs responsibility to oversee HEI financial health]</b></li> <li>• Contribute to meeting the projected increase in economic and employer demand for higher level skills and qualifications in the labour market. – <b>the employer skills survey and employer perspectives survey that are currently biennial (that may change) provide appropriate metrics at a regional (4 in Wales) level.</b></li> </ul> <p>Indicators based on HE admissions, retention, completion and on budgets are reliable. Indicators based on survey results would be less so, but reliability can be improved by application of robust methods and harmonised approaches.</p> <p>Through supporting a better qualified population, contribute to economic growth, improvements in health</p> <p>There is a body of evidence which demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the direct, independent relationship between increasing qualification level and improved reported health and wellbeing<sup>121</sup>.</li> </ul>
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<sup>121</sup> [Revisiting the benefits of higher education](#)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an inverse, independent relationship between increasing qualification level and propensity to health-limiting behaviours – substance misuse, smoking.</li> <li>• a direct relationship between productivity increases and the share of the workforce qualified to graduate level<sup>122</sup>.</li> </ul> <p>However, the impact of the Diamond reforms upon health and economic growth would be almost impossible to detect. Firstly because of the time it takes for any perceptible long-term change in health or economic growth to emerge, and secondly, the quantity and range of other simultaneous factors which will also contribute. (In the UK, increases in the graduate rate have occurred simultaneously to, and themselves been impacted by the considerable improvements in attainments at all key stages over the past two decades.</p>
<b>Testable?</b>	Is it possible to identify which linkages in the causal chain will be most critical to the success of the project, and thus should be the focus of evaluation questions?	<p>The following links are most critical to the success of the reforms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• between <b>the enhanced offer</b> and <b>enrolment, retention and completion rates</b>, in general and amongst lower participation groups, in full time and part time modes.</li> <li>• between <b>the enhanced offer</b> and <b>perceptions of potential/students and parents</b> of the value of the offer, their level of concern regarding financial hardship and their reliance on expensive forms of finance.</li> <li>• Between the <b>removal of fee grants and their replacement with loans</b> and the <b>spend by WG on other HE priorities</b></li> <li>• Between the <b>tuition fee maximum of £9,000</b> and the <b>financial security of HE providers</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Contextualised?</b>	Have assumptions about the roles of other actors outside the project been made explicit? (both enablers and constrainers) Are there plausible plans to monitor these in any practicable way?	<p>The contextual factors are numerous and complex. Enrolment, retention and completion are affected by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The efforts and impact of institution-level support upon retention and completion. Support offered can be financial (this data is available, but may only be so at the institution level)</li> <li>• More is known about these factors at Wales' providers. Less at England's providers (one quarter of all Welsh-domiciled students, and two fifths of undergraduates study at England's HE institutions).</li> </ul>

<sup>122</sup> "at least one-third of the 34% increase in labour productivity between 1994 and 2005 can be attributed to the accumulation of graduate skills in the labour force". [The relationship between graduates and economic growth across countries](#)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macro-economic effects – employment rates, family incomes affect applications and retention.</li> <li>• Marketing and widening access activities on a national (instigated by WG and SFW) and institution level</li> <li>• Perception of the impact of study on employment opportunities.</li> </ul> <p>A contributions analysis approach which considers all these factors will be necessary. There is an existing body of relevant background research, but it needs to be identified and its contribution made explicit. Investment in new evidence gathering and research by Welsh Government is required.</p>
<b>Consistent?</b>	Is there consistency in the way the Theory of Change is described across various project multiple documents (Design, M&E plans, work plans, progress reports, etc.)	Not really. A draft TOC is to be the subject of peer review and advice.
<b>Complexity?</b>	Are there expected to be multiple interactions between different project components? [complicating attribution of causes and identification of effects] How clearly defined are the expected interactions?	<p>This area needs more work. It is recognised that the removal of the fee grant may deter some students from applying due to debt aversion; whilst the improved maintenance offer will have an opposite effect. However, these relative contributions have not been fully quantified.</p> <p>The affordability of living expenses depends on their cost, as well as student income to cover them.</p> <p>Following a Diamond recommendation, the cost of a ‘basket of goods’ sold to students by their institutions (accommodation etc) for Wales’ HEIs is to be collated and compared by HEFCW, however only the Student Income and Expenditure survey or other surveys, can provide evidence of student living costs.</p>
<b>Agreement?</b>	To what extent are different stakeholders holding different views about the project objectives and how they will be	<p>Depending on their interests, stakeholders appear to understand and focus on the project objectives in varying ways.</p> <p>HEIs priority appears to be the financial stability and autonomy that a sustainable funding</p>

	<p>achieved? How visible are the views of stakeholders who might be expected to have different views?</p>	<p>system will offer. They feel student number controls are not desired nor effective in reducing spending.</p> <p>Students and their representatives focus on how the student support package will remove financial barriers to participation and completion and reduce financial worry and stress.</p> <p>Advocates of part time and postgraduate study (who overlap with the other groups) focus on the improved opportunities that support will provide and their potential impact on widening participation.</p> <p>There are tensions between the WG wish to only support part-time provision which is fully quality assured and of a higher than 25% intensity, and other stakeholders who want to maximise the types of provision that can be supported.</p>
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2. Information availability		Notes
<p><b>Is a complete set of documents available?</b></p>	<p>...relative to what could have been expected? E.g. Project proposal, Progress Reports, Evaluations / impact assessments, Commissioned studies</p>	<p>The Diamond review considered a wide range of evidence comprehensively, including research. The recent NUS Pound in your pocket study and Student Income and Expenditure Survey were included. Extensive modelling and forecasting work was done to explore the financial impacts upon WG budgets of developing proposals.</p> <p>A limited amount of work was commissioned, including an exploration of evidence about part-time study and focus group work to explore attitudes to the current support regime and elicit ideas for the future.</p> <p>Following its recommendations, officials developed proposals for implementing the accepted recommendations and consulted upon these during the spring of 2017. A benefits realisation plan has been developed.</p>
<p><b>Do baseline measures exist?</b></p>	<p>If baseline data is not yet available, are there specific plans for when baseline data would be collected and how feasible are these?</p> <p>If baseline data exists in the form of survey data, is the raw data available, or just selected currently relevant items? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?</p> <p>If baseline data is in the form of national or subnational statistics, how disaggregated is the data? Are time series data available, for pre-project years?</p>	<p><b>In relation to the student finance and widening access elements:</b></p> <p>Enrolment, retention and completion rates baseline data are available at the student level: HESA data. There are a limited range of student characteristics within this dataset.</p> <p>Details of loan, grant and family income are available at the student level: SLC data. Some, very limited student characteristics data is available within this dataset.</p> <p>Comprehensive data is available from education datasets (PLASC, LLWR, post-16 collection, WED) about the personal and study characteristics, and attainments of Welsh-domiciled students whilst at school and in FE. The availability of these datasets offers the potential for linking and detailed analysis of application, retention and completion by student attribute.</p> <p>Datasets go back more than a decade. Exploring the personal and</p>

		<p>study characteristics of students who enrolled in the 2012-2018 regime is available (2012 enrollers would have been in year 11 in 2009/10).</p> <p>The student income and expenditure survey for 2013/14 provides a suitable sample-based baseline of the financial position of all students prior to reforms. These data will be available at the individual level in the National Data Archive.</p> <p><b>In relation to making finance available to deliver other WG HE priorities</b></p> <p>Details of budget and expenditure on different programmes is, and will continue to be available.</p> <p><b>In relation to the financial position of HEIs</b></p> <p>HESA finance record presents income by type.</p>
<p><b>Is there data on a control group?</b></p>	<p>Is it clear how the control group compares to the intervention group? Is the raw data available or just summary statistics? Are the members of the control group identifiable and potentially contactable? How frequently has data been collected on the status of the control group?</p>	<p>There is no control group, as the policy is being implemented universally. Counterfactual options are students and HEIs under the 2012-18 regime, and under the English regime.</p> <p><b>In relation to the student finance and widening access elements</b></p> <p>Comprehensive raw data are available about Welsh-domiciled student background, qualification, attainments and retention and completion, (HESA, SLC, NPD, LLWR datasets) though some datasets would need to be matched. An English-domiciled counterfactual group based on this data would need to be negotiated with DfE, but could perhaps be procured at a non-disclosive level</p> <p>SIES – the possibility of propensity score matching of English and Welsh-domiciled student data.</p>

		<p><b>In relation to making finance available to deliver other WG HE priorities</b></p> <p>Counterfactual comparisons are not possible.</p> <p><b>In relation to the HEI sustainability and budget elements</b></p> <p>Historic HESA data would be available. It should be possible to explore the possibility of English HEI data for a comparison group of matched English HEIs – would need to be confirmed</p>
<b>Is data being collected for all the indicators?</b>	Is it with sufficient frequency? Is there significant missing data? Are the measures being used reliable i.e. Is measurement error likely to be a problem?	<p><b>Students:</b> Plenty of frequent data on enrolments, retention, completion. This data is limited without linking between administrative datasets. However, student perceptions evidence is dependent on expensive surveys and is infrequent and sample-based, meaning limits on the detail available.</p> <p><b>Spend on other priorities:</b> Basis data available with sufficient frequency</p> <p><b>Finances of HEIs:</b> basic HESA data available with sufficient frequency</p>
<b>Is critical data available?</b>	Are the intended and actual beneficiaries identifiable? Is there a record of who was involved in what project activities and when?	<p>Yes. HEIs and budget allocations are easily identifiable.</p> <p>Students: our administrative datasets provide comprehensive details about potential and actual students.</p>
<b>Is gender disaggregated data available?</b>	In the baseline? For each of the indicators during project intervention? In the control group? In any mid-term or process review?	Yes. Other equalities groups are of more interest. – E.g. POLAR percentiles, SEG, school attended etc. These data depend on linking of administrative datasets..

<b>If reviews or evaluations have been carried out...</b>	Are the reports available? Are the authors contactable? Is the raw data available? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?	No existing evaluation reports.
<b>Do existing M&amp;E systems have the capacity to deliver?</b>	Where data is not yet available, do existing staff and systems have the capacity to do so in the future? Are responsibilities, sources and periodicities defined and appropriate? Is the budget adequate?	We have some resource to harness existing administrative datasets, and a long-term commitment to invest in surveys (SIES, ESS, EPS) and analysis of survey data, but this is not set out in detail, nor guaranteed. We are seeking advice from peers about how we might best approach investment in further evidence to support the evaluation.
<b>3. Institutional context</b>		<b>Notes</b>
<b>Practicality</b>		
<b>Accessibility to and availability of stakeholders?</b>	Are there physical security risks? Will weather be a constraint? Are staff and key stakeholders likely to be present, or absent on leave or secondment? Can reported availability be relied upon?	Stakeholders would include officials from WG, Welsh Government sponsored bodies (WGSBs), sector representative organisations (UW, NUS) expert commentators, students, HEI staff. Timely planning would permit satisfactory access.  Security risks are minimal.
<b>Resources available to do the evaluation?</b>	Time available in total and in country? Timing within the schedule of all other activities? Funding available for the relevant team and duration? People with the necessary skills available at this point?	To be planned. Proposals for an approach to evaluation will be set out for senior officers and ministers who will take a decision as to the level of investment to be made.
<b>Is the timing right?</b>	Is there an opportunity for an evaluation to have an influence? Has the project accumulated enough implementation experience to enable useful lessons to be extracted? If the evaluation was planned in advance, is the evaluation still relevant?	The evaluation needs to look the impact of financial reforms on students and HEIs in the medium term (2 years, 5 years and 10 years), exploring first of all the impact on enrolment and student perceptions, and HE finance, and later, covering also retention and completion. Ultimately looking at impacts upon qualification levels and health and wellbeing of the Welsh people. This extended evaluation period will

		allow exploration of these impacts and lessons to be learnt at each stage.
<b>Coordination requirements?</b>	How many other donors, government departments, or NGOs need to be or want to be involved? What forms of coordination are possible and/or required?	The Diamond Stakeholder Group will want to be engaged in the evaluation advisory group.
<b>Utility</b>		
<b>Who wants an evaluation?</b>	Have the primary users been clearly identified? Can they be involved in defining the evaluation? Will they participate in an evaluation process?	The Diamond project includes an evaluation programme. It was a recommendation that was accepted fully by WG. Currently, primary users are fully committed to participation.
<b>What do stakeholders want to know?</b>	What evaluation questions are of interest to whom? Are these realistic, given the project design and likely data availability? Can they be prioritised? How do people want to see the results used? Is this realistic?	<p>Ministers and WG officials will be concerned to understand the impact on WG policy priorities, to enhance opportunities, widen access, increase the affordability of study, secure HEIs future and deliver other future priorities.</p> <p>External stakeholder priorities for the focus of the evaluation need to be explored further. It is proposed that the peer review exercise include some interviews with major stakeholders to establish their key questions.</p>
<b>What sort of evaluation process do stakeholders want?</b>	What designs do stakeholders express interest in? Could these work, given the evaluation of the questions of interest and likely information availability, and resources available?	<p>Ministers and WG officials will wish to exploit the rich administrative data sources available and harness the best data manipulation techniques to do so.</p> <p>They will also want to utilise qualitative techniques to explore the experiences and concerns of students and their representatives, to supplement, interpret and enhance evidence from datasets.</p> <p>They will seek the use of literature review and stakeholder interview to better understand the wider Welsh, UK and international context, whereby economic, labour market, and political factors may influence</p>

		the impact of the reforms.
<b>What ethical issues exist?</b>	Are they known or knowable? Are they likely to be manageable? What constraints will they impose?	<p>Due to potential privacy and disclosure issues, obtaining, matching and analysing student data will require a diligent and timely approach to data access and data sharing, but should be feasible. The relevant consent and usage permissions are in place.</p> <p>The creation of a new PCET body, if it becomes responsible for the Wales HESA record may change access arrangements, but the issues involved will be mainly administrative.</p> <p>There may be sensitivity issues in relation obtaining details of the financial position of individual HEIs, to disclosing this information, and to disclosing the different rates at which HEIs in Wales achieve enrolment, retention and completion.</p>
<b>What are the risks?</b>	Will stakeholders be able to manage negative findings? Have previous evaluation experiences prejudiced stakeholder's likely participation?	<p>There are risks that stakeholders will be unhappy with negative findings. It will not be sufficient to simply describe changes in student factors and budgets. The evaluation should be in sufficient depth to explore explanations for changes in detail, to help stakeholders understand how negative and positive findings have arisen and how to address them.</p> <p>Dissemination of findings will need to be managed with care.</p>