

# Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales

To help with our analysis please let us know who completed this response.

Name	<b>Mary van den Heuvel</b>
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Are you responding in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation?

I am responding in a personal capacity [  ]

I am responding on behalf of an organisation [  ]

## Contact details (optional)

Position/job title (where relevant)	Policy Officer
Name of organisation (where relevant)	ATL Cymru – the education union
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In the event that there are any queries about your response, are you willing to be contacted by a member of the review team? Yes [  ] No [  ]

## If responding on behalf of an organisation, which of these best describes your organisation:

Private sector [  ] Public sector [  ] Third sector [  ]

Other: please specify

### **About ATL Cymru – the education union**

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers represents over 160,000 education professionals across the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom. It draws its membership from teachers and lecturers, leaders and support staff in maintained and independent schools, and Further Education Colleges. As well as campaigning vigorously to protect and enhance members' pay and conditions ATL also believes that the education profession has a key role in developing education strategy and policy. ATL Cymru represents over 6,500 education professionals in colleges

and schools across the whole of Wales.

**If your organisation is a company/employer:**

is it based in Wales?  is it based elsewhere in the UK?   
does it employ graduates?  does it sponsor HE students?

Please provide details of type of organisation/business sector classification:

Education Union

**Our response**

**Please note that we have answered questions appropriate to our members, which are outlined below.**

**ATL Cymru believes that every learner in Wales should have the opportunity to reach their potential. Young people should not have their choice of university restricted by its location. Everyone should be able to undertake whichever course and attend whichever education institution is most appropriate to helping them fulfil their potential and support their learning for life.**

**We would like to emphasise our answer to Question 14, which we are deeply concerned has been included in this Review. It is not appropriate to ask HE stakeholders which part of the education sector, as a whole, should be a priority for Welsh Government. This is a question for the whole sector.**

**Questionnaire**

**Q1. To what extent do current student finance/support arrangements (student grants and loans) meet the needs of HE students, support the delivery of high-quality HE provision and provide value for money?**

The Review Panel is interested in hearing about the strengths and benefits of current arrangements as well as any weaknesses or issues.

Very well  Well  Not very well  Don't know

Please provide a reason(s) for your answer and where available, supporting evidence.

ATL Cymru is broadly supportive of the current Welsh Government fees regime, which doesn't leave students from Wales with student debts as significant as those elsewhere in the UK.

However, we do note that the current scheme could be less favourable to those on part-time courses and those institutions which offer part-time provision. We believe there should be a funding model which supports those who return to learning later on in life.

We note that those within the education workforce are increasingly being encouraged by WG to support their 'career continuum' through continued professional learning<sup>1</sup>. We particularly note that in the *Draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales*<sup>2</sup> there are details of expected qualifications for the education workforce. It would be unfair to expect the cost-burden for these kind of courses to fall on the student or learner.

**Q2. Do you think that the Welsh Government policy of supporting Welsh domiciled students to study elsewhere in the UK is sustainable and/or desirable in the long term?**

Sustainable: Yes [ ] No [ ]

Desirable: Yes [x] No [ ]

There has been a lot of debate in the run-up to the Review about cross-border flows of HE students in and out of Wales and about the sustainability of the Welsh Government's decision to provide financial assistance (in the form of a fee grant) to Welsh-domiciled students that study at universities elsewhere in the UK. The Review Panel is keen to hear stakeholder views regarding this particular policy position.

Please provide a reason(s) for your answer and where available, any supporting evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/educationandskills/2014/140610-new-deal-education/?skip=1&lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/education/10-year-plan-for-the-early-years-childcare-and-play-workforce/?lang=en>

ATL Cymru believes very strongly that WG policy should ensure the maximum choice for learners leaving school and FE in terms of HE institutions at which they can study, as well as ensuring those who need to study part-time are able to do so.

We would not want to see any changes to the system which would prohibit learners from reaching their full potential and preventing them from choosing to study in institutions which are outside of Wales.

Whilst we welcome any effort to ensure that Wales has a healthy and thriving HE sector, we believe that students must be encouraged to look beyond Wales if that is how they will fulfil their potential.

The Welsh Government recently launched the 'Oxbridge Hubs'<sup>3</sup> in recognition of the low rates of applications to Oxbridge from students in Wales. Both Cambridge and Oxford have long been considered World class higher education institutions within the UK – hence the investment from WG in Hubs. It would be ludicrous if this policy of encouraging greater application to Oxbridge were contradicted by a funding policy that made take up of places financially unattractive.

We believe that WG should do everything it can to ensure that their main priority is that students go to the most suitable institutions for them – be they outside or inside of Wales.

Because this is so important to ensure that Wales is able to fulfil the potential of its citizens, WG must ensure that access to appropriate courses, where ever they are, is sustainable.

**Q4. To what extent do current HE sector funding and student finance arrangements support measures to widen access and improve participation in HE? Are there any alternative arrangements that you would like to see?**

Very well [ ]      Well [ x ]      Not very well [ ]      Don't know [ ]

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-30818059>

Please provide a reason(s) for your answer, and where available, supporting evidence. If the response is 'Not very well', please provide details of any alternative arrangements that you would like to see.

ATL Cymru welcomes the current WG financial support which encourages students from all backgrounds, including those who do not traditionally go to university, to fulfil their potential, without the full financial implications of the tuition fees charged elsewhere in the UK.

We do however note that part-time students may not be supported in the same way as full-time ones, and think that addressing this could help bring parity to the sector – and help everyone in Wales fulfil their potential.

This summer saw a 4% increase in places at university gained by young people in Wales – faster than anywhere else in the UK<sup>4</sup>. The increase in Welsh students positively correlates to the Welsh Government support for all students entering the higher education system in Wales. We would be very concerned about any policies changes which could jeopardise this.

**Q8. What does a top-class HE system look like and what would be the implications of not having a top-class HE system in Wales?**

This is deliberately broad. Your response will inform the Review Panel's thinking about the type of HE system that the final recommendations are designed to support. The question may be considered from an economic development, innovation and research, community, social, cultural, quality, structural, financial, student, employer or any other perspective you think appropriate. In forming your response, examples of good practice that you wish to draw to the Review Panel's attention would be welcome.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/number-welsh-students-winning-university-7673524>

You will note in our answer to Q2 above that ATL Cymru believe strongly that allowing students choice to travel to the most suitable institution for them and therefore allowing them to travel outside Wales is fundamental to the success of Welsh students in HE.

We believe that Welsh students have the right to attend universities which are internationally valued anywhere in the UK and EU.

Welsh universities must do all they can to ensure their courses are internationally valued and are attracting students from across the UK.

**Q14.** A decade of financial austerity has been forecast with regard to public sector funding in Wales. A finite budget will be available to the Welsh Government and the Department for Education and Skills. The Review Panel will need to take this into account when making its final recommendations if they are to be deliverable, affordable and sustainable. The Review Panel will need to ensure that its recommendations for HE funding are set within the wider education context, and it will need to provide a very strong evidence base to support any recommendation that is likely to result in a redirection or increase of funding to HE. Given this position, and considering the education system as a whole:

**Where should the highest priority be for any future redirection or investment of additional education sector funding?**

Schools [  ] Further education [  ] Higher education [  ]

Other [  ] Please specify:.....

Please provide a reason(s) for your answer, and where available, supporting evidence.

We would like the Panel to note that we strongly object to this question being asked within the context of this Review. This Review has clearly been aimed at those within the HE sector. Without proper consultation of those across the whole education sector it would be inappropriate for the Review to address this.

As an education union with membership based across schools and the FE sector we want to emphasise the importance of maintaining funding across the whole education sector. Indeed, we would argue a strong education during compulsory school age for children and young people in Wales is important, not only to ensure they reach their individual potential but to help ensure Wales has a bright and prosperous future – including in the HE sector.