

CYPE(5)-20-20 – Paper to note 1

Additional information from NUS Cymru following the meeting on 23 June

There were a few questions that we unasked due to time constraints, grateful if you could send us a written response to the following:

1. Exploring in more depth the impact on further education learners

- a.** What has been the experience of FE learners during the emergency? What concerns or issues are being fed back to you – likewise what has been working well?
 - b.** Are there any concerns about the experience FE learners will have when they start or return in September and how teaching will be delivered – particularly for those studying practical courses?
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- a.** **What has been the experience of FE learners during the emergency? What concerns or issues are being fed back to you – likewise what has been working well?**

Feedback from NUS members in FE suggests students in the sector have been struggling with remote working more than their HE peers. There is less of a tradition of remote / independent working in FE than HE, so adapting to remote working has been more difficult for FE students. A survey of Cardiff and Vale College students found that two thirds were experiencing difficulties working from home.

Remote working has exposed disparities in students' access to appropriate study space at home. While we are satisfied that colleges have provided learners with laptops to continue working from home – assisted by Welsh Government funding for this purpose – there are still issues that students from poorer households are more likely to have cramped, uncomfortable study spaces, and a poor / non-existent internet connection. FE students living in rural areas are also more likely to face connectivity problems. Of course, these are issues outside of colleges' control, but mean that it is more likely that learners from disadvantaged will be further behind in their studies and more in need of interventions to get them up to speed. Without these interventions the crisis has the potential to erode progress made in closing attainment gaps and widening access to FE and HE.

Transport has been raised as an issue among FE members as well. Many learners at our FE colleges commute to college but because of heavily reduced public transport services they fear they will face issues getting to college in the first place.

b. Are there any concerns about the experience FE learners will have when they start or return in September and how teaching will be delivered - particularly for those studying practical courses?

According to our survey, 71% of students with a vocational element to their course told us they thought Covid-19 would have a negative impact on their course. Inevitably while social distancing remains in place colleges' capacity to deliver the vocational / practical element of any course will be, to a degree, compromised. A lot depends on how social distancing rules change in the coming weeks and months, but we are certainly concerned by the prospect of a second wave and the impact that will have on students - especially those with practical elements to their studies.

Supplementary information: Housing

Also for the committee's interest on housing:

- Up to 70% of students moved home for lockdown. NUS coronavirus and students survey found just 9% of students given chance to break their contract. Most student tenancies are fixed term and end 30 June, meaning many students have been paying rent on vacant properties since March.
- All universities let students who were living in university-owned accommodation out of their contracts early. Mixed picture for purpose-built student accommodation providers (PBSAs) operated by commercial landlords and houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) which are often leased by individual landlords.
- Returning students face a dilemma of either signing for a contract now or waiting until September to see what learning will look like. Many students will already have signed contracts for 2020/21 - some as early as November/December before the virus had emerged.
- The Scottish Government legislated through its Coronavirus No 2 Act to give students currently in a contract a 7-day notice period and those who have signed up for a contract for 2020/21 a 28-day notice period. We'd back a similar course of action to protect students who have already committed to a contract in Wales.