**Education Policy across the Home Counties**

HE sector has never been more changeable – change is happening faster in decision making.

The Office for Students to be seen as regulator is the rhetoric they’re trying to promote. The OfS is not in place to give out money, but to provide regulations.

NCOPs are getting bigger in their ‘hubs’

Tundra data provides information less about participation and more about awareness. Very much in line with the NCOP way of working.

There has been an increase in the number of Firsts and 2:1s across universities. Lots of debate about why this is. Are students working harder because they’re paying more? How does this affect the value of a UK degree?

UCAS and OfS are shifting a big focus onto FE and Apprenticeships.

DLHE data being replaced by graduate outcomes.

**Scotland**

Things are bit different on Scotland. Some key highlights & updates:

The curriculum in Scotland is SCQF (Scottish credit qualification free mark) which doesn’t map to the NQF so creates difficulties when transferring students between English & Scottish entry requirements.

Curriculum is split between 2 stages – Primary (up to s3) and secondary (s4-s6). Schools that are offering different qualifications in different years and universities have no idea how each school is running through UCAS. Some students may have achieved grades over 1 year and some over 2. Should universities know this and should they be dealt with different?

Universities are trying to directly match English entry requirements but by asking for 3 Advanced Highers they are asking for the equivalent of more than 3 A Levels which is an impossible ask for students.

An additional frustration is that the media slates Unconditional Offers based on English offers. But Scotland can give them out as students can become qualified before they leave school. If UCAS decide to make changes then it will affect Scottish institutions as they rely on Unconditional Offers.

There is a misconception that university is free to Scottish students. There are tuition fees but taxpayers pay for this so universities have a capped number of students they can accept from Scotland & EU. They get fined if they miss or go over this number. Rules say you can’t discriminate against other EU member states but can against your own. This means it’s a lot easier for English, Welsh & Norther Irish applicants to get a place in Scotland, even though they will have to pay fees. After Brexit the cap will only be for Scottish students. Politically they are saying they will keep free places for EU students to rally for 2nd Indyref.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation set WP targets. If universities miss this target then they are fined. By going over they are not fined but have to manage the proportion of students.

Clearing in Scotland is very different. After confirmation they look at targets to see who else they can take. In Clearing for rest of UK, but have to be careful with Scottish student numbers.

By 2030 the Scottish government wants 30% of university students to come from the lowest 20% of advantaged Scottish students. In order to work towards these there are various WP programmes. For example, the Gender Action Plan: by 2030 no course should have a greater than 25/75 gender split. They also want to reduce the participation gap between genders to 5% points. The equality act 2010 stops you discriminating by gender so makes it impossible to alter admission practices to increase one gender or the other.

**Wales**

Wales has a bilingual education system. There are approximately 45 secondary schools which offer entirely Welsh or combined Welsh & English education.

Welsh Bacc qualification has changed over the past few years which has received mixed feedback from students and parents.

Wales has kept the letter grades for GCSEs and has not switched to the number grades. The AS has stayed coupled with the A2 and has created a feeling of unfairness that they have to declare AS grades and English students don’t.

Massive changes to curriculum from sept 2020-2022 for 3-16 year olds. There will be no national curriculum or framework. Skills for Life will be taught based on mental wellbeing and preparation for the future. Questions are do they need to keep GCSEs due to the new framework? Not a lot of talk on post-16 learning. The new curriculum won’t naturally lead into A Levels or BTECS.

Will there be progression steps rather than formal exams?

The curriculum needs to change – it has been the same since 1987. The big challenges are around teacher CPD – this will be new to everybody. There is a budget for this but no specific information yet.

The schools can deliver whatever they want as long as they cover the 6 areas of learning & experience. Location school facilities will naturally create an inequality in the delivery and what schools can provide. Teachers are asking for frameworks to help with the transition.

Primary and SEN schools will find this less challenging as this type of teaching happens already – secondary will struggle more. Still a lot of unknowns and less than 2 years until this is over all schools in Wales. This is not a suggestion – it will happen.

For universities there’s talk about teaching the skills to very young students about what a 1st year UG student might learn – e.g. digital research.

Finance – PG bursaries new for this year; no big changes expected but a small increase in maintenance allowance.

All students get the same amount of support. The means tested element means the split between loan & grant will be different but total amount will be the same.

Demographic decline steeper in Wales than the rest of the UK. All Welsh universities agree with the principle of raising aspirations within SEREN Network events but they need to support Welsh universities to keep welsh students and not funnel them to Russell Groups in the rest of UK.

The cap of £9000 tuition fees, not £9250, is making welsh universities miss out on money that can be put towards support & jobs.

**England**

APP – conversations have been that they have set extremely specific targets across broad areas. These become priorities for everyone as they are linked to fees – if targets are not met then universities can’t charge the £9250 fees.

This will mean more cross-working across WP and Recruitment teams in order to meet the targets.

Removal of HEFCE money has put squeeze on universities – OfS not giving funding has put pressure on universities – which means they have more targets to reach but not the money to do so

18 year old population going up but not stopping – will it lead to student number controls coming back? Student number controls were for everybody, then changed to be based on the grades students achieved, then scrapped altogether.

Latest figures show that approx 82% students don’t repay their loan – so where is the debt being covered from? The £5000 bursary for Nursing has been reinstated and £3000 bursary for a specialism such as mental health nursing. There are no controls on this so as many people can get this as possible.

There has been a shift in attitudes to where students want to study. 55% now study locally and a large proportion stay local to home. This is very different in London – if a student studies in London 80% remain there after graduation.

Looking at a Northern STEM powerhouse to challenge MIT.

There won’t be a TEF 2020, but still might see subject-level TEF. How will this be explained in Marketing if institution is Gold but subject is Bronze?

Brexit will mean an attractive offer for international students for ‘Global Britain. Will mean broadening who we work with on research projects where it’s previously been EU grants.

Even during the demographic dip, HE remains popular. University applications increased even as the number of 18 year olds decreased. There will be a focus on HE alternatives – apprenticeships – has the investment been put into good apprenticeship offerings? Anticipating a push to HNDs and Level 5 qualifications to see if that will qualify people to work and transferring into a degree if not. Will probably see a lot of FE colleges offering these. Question for universities to consider is how they admit students into years 2/3 of degrees.

Admissions review – although UUK and OfS are doing their own reviews it is likely that UUK will be asked to feed into the OfS recommendations.

PQA/Offers conversation has continued as it works in other countries. China does this really well as they only have 3 qualifications you can go to university with. In the UK there are 450+ qualifications for university entry. Not obvious how PQA will work with this.

In order for PQA to work would there have to be a review into the curriculum, and a change in qualifications and set exam times. Or start universities in January.

Post Qualification Offers are more feasible – students would still apply at same time but offers would only go out once results are gained.

If subject level TEF happens, will caps be put on student numbers until the programme improves?

Websites for more info: Times Higher Education, WONKHE, HEPI, OfS.

Q – The Welsh Bacc has been challenging over the years – what are the chances of students getting into English institutions? With student number controls and higher number of 18 year olds, will that affect the number of Welsh Bacc students being accepted?

* We will probably see a rise in the number of institutions becoming a member of OfS and expanding, adding campuses due to marketisation. More providers coming on board to take on the students. Otherwise, yes, it will get tougher. Something will change but difficult to say what.

Q – With students sitting Higher & Advanced Higher qualifications at different times in Scotland does that mean students go to university younger?

* Yes. The youngest student was 15. Al himself went to university at 16. This creates issues around safeguarding but the majority of students are 17/18

Q – Do Scottish universities admit to other years due to Advanced Higher qualifications?

* Yes. Advanced Higher students get offers for 2nd year entry unless the provision at their school means students couldn’t cope with the work yet. A University experimented with offering English students 2nd year entry but less than 5 students accepted. The Scottish government has a heavy focus on HNDs & level 5 qualifications. Where students study at partner colleges – if they pass they’re guaranteed entry to 2nd year (Engineering). The government wants students with HNDs to go into 3rd year but that’s not easy to match to the curriculum. HND, Advanced Higher and 1st UG year are all Level 7. Some students don’t have the right information so can study at level 7 for 3 years.
* The HE and FE model is common also in Wales. Positive for students who aren’t ready for university – still challenging in the content that students study before Year 3.

Q – Do students have to apply for Student Finance in order to get nursing bursary

* If it works the way it has done before then it should be separate to loans but still administered by SLC. Usually there’s no criteria to say they have to get a loan as well as the bursary. However, it’s not anticipated that students will be able to survive entirely off the loan, as they will have placements and some are restricted on getting a part time job.

Q – Will the nursing bursary be retrospective for current students?

* This has not been addressed yet. They have announced it but no information yet on how it will be implemented. Would be nice to see but not sure.