

**Evidence to the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance
Arrangements in Wales**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 What follows is based upon analysis carried out by researchers at the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) over the past few years. This work is continuing and, accordingly, the results reported here should be seen as ‘interim’. However, further results can be made available to the Review; and we should be happy to produce specific analyses for the Review, if asked to do so.
- 1.2 As requested, we focus on three specific issues:
- What factors influence entry to higher education (HE) by young people resident in Wales?
 - What is the nature of flows across the borders of Wales for university study?
 - What have been the impacts of widening access initiatives on participation in Welsh universities?

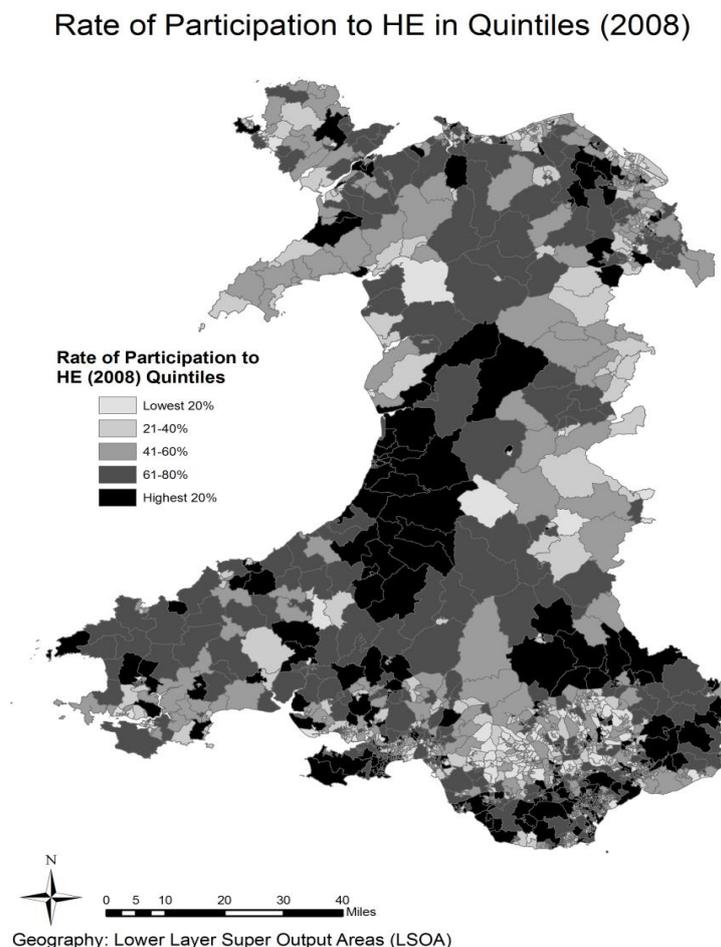
2. Determinants of Entry/Non-Entry to Higher Education

- 2.1 A basic question to be addressed about contemporary HE is that of why some young people go to university and others do not. Whilst there is substantial research of a general nature that attempts to answer this question, it is much more difficult to do so in the specific economic and social context of Wales, where previous research is much less plentiful. This has become especially pertinent, given the divergence in policy approaches adopted by the UK Government in England and the devolved administrations, including the Welsh Government, with respect to higher education since the advent of parliamentary devolution at the end of the 1990s.
- 2.2 It is, of course, possible to provide simple accounts of the determinants of entry to HE. For example, Figure 1 gives a snap-shot of rates of participation in HE in local areas across Wales. This is *suggestive* of a strong relationship between economic and social disadvantage and levels of participation. However, more complex analysis is required to explore the *multiple* determinants of rates of participation.
- 2.3 Ongoing research by WISERD addresses this issue directly.¹ It analyses a database (the Widening Access Database²) which brings together three linked administrative data-sets: the National Pupil Database (NPD) for Wales (including Pupil Level Annual Schools Census data); individual learner records from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) for young people who are registered at further education colleges; and individual student records from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). At its core, the database permits the analysis of individual educational trajectories through the compulsory education sector (from the age of 11), to post-16 education and on to HE, of three cohorts of young people who were in Year 11 (the final year of compulsory schooling, referred to as Key Stage 4) in Wales during 2004/5, 2005/6 and 2006/7. Accordingly, we are able to compare individuals who go on to HE with those who do not (Wright and Davies, 2014).

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² The Widening Access Database has generously been made available by the Welsh Government. It is worth noting that considerable further work will be required to make this database a user-friendly source of information that will permit continuing analysis of patterns of participation in HE by Welsh young people.

Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of HE Participation within Wales



- 2.4 Crucially, this analysis permits direct comparison of the situation in Wales with that in England, where Chowdry *et al.* (2013) have previously carried out an equivalent analysis. This comparison indicates that the factors that are most closely associated with participation in HE in Wales are *broadly the same as those that are identified in the study of England*. Hence, in both countries, young people from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds are much more likely to participate than their less advantaged peers. However, in Wales, unlike England, the most disadvantaged (the bottom quintile in terms of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation) are not the least likely to participate in HE, rather the least likely participants are the group immediately above them (the fourth quintile), when other factors (previous educational attainment, ethnic background, take-up of free school meals, type of school and so forth) are also taken into account.
- 2.5 Much – although not all – of this relationship between socio-economic background and HE participation is accounted for by previous educational attainment (which is the most important single factor, when all others are taken into account). Ethnic background is also highly significant, with ‘White other’ and ‘non-White’ groups significantly more likely to participate than ‘White British’ students (Wright, forthcoming).
- 2.6 It is important to note two implications that flow from this analysis. Firstly, there is no evidence here that either distinctive economic and social conditions or the policy

divergences between Wales and England in relation to participation in HE have brought about major differences in the factors affecting patterns of participation. Of course, this conclusion is specific to the data that we have analysed; however, it is consistent with other studies based on wider and different types of analysis (most notably, for example, Raffe and Croxford, 2013). An exception here relates to the most disadvantaged quintile on WIMD score, which – as noted earlier - has a higher rate of HE participation than the fourth quintile, in contrast with the English pattern. This *may* reflect the impacts of Welsh interventions aimed at raising levels of participation in Communities First areas, although further work is required to explore this possibility more fully.³

- 2.7 Secondly, our analysis re-affirms what many other studies have highlighted. Policy intervention at the point of entry to HE is likely to have limited impacts on patterns of participation, unless the intervention addresses the role played by previous educational attainment. This is not to suggest that other forms of intervention can be abandoned; especially as we do not know what patterns of participation would have been in the absence of these. However, it is important to be *realistic* about the scope of the effects that these other forms of intervention have on participation patterns.

3. Cross-border Flows in HE Participation

- 3.1 One of the most distinctive features of the participation of Welsh students in HE is that such a substantial proportion of them do so in universities that are not in Wales. Table 1 shows the trends in these cross-border flows (for full-time undergraduates).

Table 1: Students in Universities Outside Country of Domicile, %

Domicile	Year of entry				
	1996	2004	2010	2011	2012
Wales	50.9	43.8	37.8	39.3	41.8
England	6.4	5.2	4.6	4.8	4.8
N. Ireland	40.9	29.7	33.9	37.2	31.2
Scotland	7.5	6.2	5.7	6.3	4.8

Source: Croxford and Raffe (2014)

As can be seen, unlike in the other UK countries, movement out of Wales to university has been increasing appreciably since 2010. This reverses the downward trend during the previous decade and more. Equally striking is the pattern of movement into Welsh universities from elsewhere in the UK and from England, in particular. Hence, in 2012, whilst some 53 per cent of enrolments of full-time undergraduates in Welsh universities were accounted for by Welsh residents; 46 per cent of those enrolling lived in England.⁴ Uniquely amongst the UK countries, therefore, the Welsh university system has highly porous boundaries, with significant movement out of *and* into Wales.

³ It is important to bear in mind that in England too there have been strategies aimed at increasing HE participation in disadvantaged areas, albeit with a different basis of identifying target areas.

⁴ Clearly, part-time enrolments were significantly more heavily weighted towards Welsh-domiciled students.

Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of Participation in Welsh Universities (2008)

HE Destinations: Wales

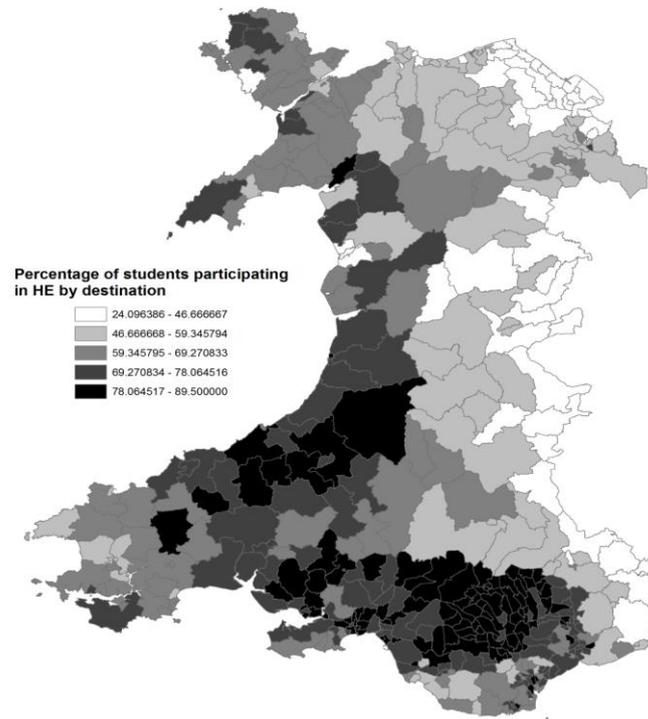
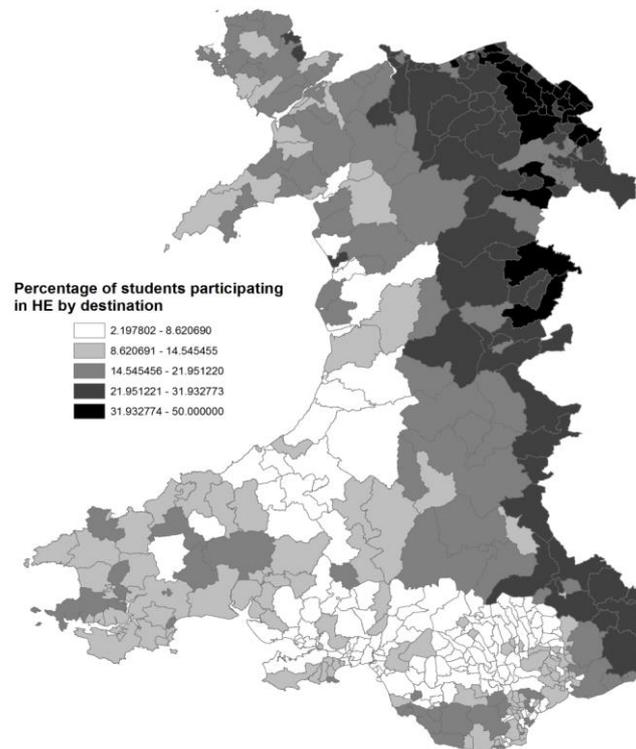


Figure 4: Geographical Distribution of Participation in English Universities (2008)

HE Destinations: Western England



- 3.2 The patterns of Welsh-domiciled students who leave Wales to go to university are differentiated within Wales. Hence, for example, there is a characteristic geographical pattern of HE destinations, with greater concentrations of participants in Welsh universities in the western and valleys areas of Wales (Figure 2); and a corresponding greater concentration of destinations in England in the east of Wales (and less pronounced concentrations in the north-west, Pembrokeshire and the Vale of Glamorgan) (Figure 3). Clearly, this geographical pattern corresponds to a considerable extent to the distribution of economic and social disadvantage too. Hence, for example, the areas highlighted in terms of going to Welsh universities correspond to those selected for special support from the European Union as a result of their intense economic disadvantages.
- 3.3 There are also complex interactions between economic and social disadvantage, geographical mobility to HE and type of university attended. Table 2 shows that students who go out of Wales for their university education are more likely to attend ‘elite’ universities than those who stay in Wales.

Table 2: Regional Distribution of Welsh-domiciled Students and Type of University (2008)

Location of University	Welsh-domiciled Students	% Students Attending	
		Russell Group	1994 Group
Wales	69689	17.8	0.0
North West	6017	26.5	3.6
South West	4947	16.6	21.9
West Midlands	2725	38.5	0.0
South East	2593	32.0	24.7
London	2530	30.3	12.3
Yorkshire & Humberside	1769	41.8	12.2
East Midlands	1637	21.6	31.5
East of England	699	41.5	18.5
North East	681	23.9	34.4
Scotland	671	34.9	12.1
Northern Ireland	53	43.4	0.0

- 3.4 Table 3, however, illustrates that those students who live in the most economically and socially disadvantaged areas – at least insofar as these are captured by Communities First designations – are more likely than their more advantaged peers to stay within Wales, even when attending an ‘elite’ university. This is a significant finding, especially in light of the important role played by Communities First in the implementation of universities’ and HEFCW’s widening access strategies.

Table 3: Regional Distribution of Welsh-domiciled Students and Communities First-domiciled Students, % (2008)

Location of University	Students at All Universities	Students at Russell Group	CF Students at All Universities	CF Students at Russell Group
Wales	74.4	64.4	83.4	75.5
North West	6.4	8.3	3.7	5.6
South West	5.2	4.3	3.5	3.3
West Midlands	2.9	5.4	1.9	4.0
South East	2.7	4.3	1.9	3.0
London	2.7	4.0	2.2	3.4
Yorkshire & Humberside	1.9	3.8	1.0	2.5
East Midlands	1.7	1.8	1.1	0.9
East of England	0.7	1.5	0.5	0.9
North East	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.5
Scotland	0.7	1.2	0.3	0.4
Northern Ireland	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1

- 3.5 Consideration of these sorts of geographical flows raises important questions about the form of HE system that we wish to see in Wales. To what extent would it be desirable to shift the Welsh system more into line with those of England and, in particular, Scotland, where universities cater essentially for ‘their own’ students, with correspondingly limited cross-border flows? More specifically, there are some grounds for believing that opportunities to move out of Wales to ‘elite’ universities appear to be less readily available to students who come from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This may well be associated with patterns of previous educational attainment, but it nevertheless raises important questions of equity.⁵

4. Widening Access Initiatives in Wales

- 4.1 Some of WISERD’s recent research has been concerned with assessing initiatives aimed at widening access to HE in Wales. The focus here has been less on the impacts of wider policies – such as the regime of student finance – and more on initiatives that aim to influence patterns of entry to HE directly and that have been undertaken by HE providers and, hitherto, the regional consortia for widening access.
- 4.2 In this context, it is important to distinguish a number of different types of approach to such widening access initiatives (Evans, 2014a). These can be summarised as follows:
- Promoting entry to ‘conventional’ HE (characteristically, full-time undergraduate programmes):
 - Activity aimed at changing knowledge of HE, attitudes towards HE (‘raising aspirations’), etc.;

⁵ In this context, it is important to note that Croxford and Raffe (2014) have argued robustly that the 2012 changes in tuition fees have not worsened this situation.

- Programmes intended to raise levels of educational attainment (including Access and other ‘top-up’ activities, as well as improving GCSE and other qualifications in collaboration with schools and colleges);
 - Changes in the terms of entry to HE (especially through contextualised admissions).
 - Modifying the forms of HE provision:
 - Part-time, distance, community-based provision;
 - Vocational provision (characteristically involving direct collaboration with employers).
- 4.3 It is important to note that the former aim predominantly to effect significant change in the individual applicant to HE; only contextualised admissions involve significant change on the part of the universities themselves. They are aimed largely at young entrants to HE. The latter, on the other hand, entail particular forms of institutional organisation, although it is often unclear how far they are truly widening access initiatives, as opposed to enduring features of university provision. Older learners are typically engaged in these forms of HE.
- 4.4 Providers of HE in Wales (both universities and further education colleges) undertake various combinations of these different types of activity, reflecting the mission of each institution and, in particular, whether they are selecting or recruiting institutions. Hence, for example, selecting universities tend to focus on improving the educational attainment of prospective young entrants; and on facilitating entry through strategies such as contextualised admissions. Recruiting universities and further education providers are much more likely (than selecting institutions) to focus on the form of provision within HE, with vocational programmes constituting a major element here.
- 4.5 Crucially for policy development in this area, it is extremely difficult to be clear as to the impacts of initiatives of this kind. Some providers (such as the Reaching Wider Regional Partnerships) have undertaken extensive evaluation exercises, but these have been confined to asking participants in initiatives to describe their views of how they have been influenced by their participation. There has been almost no evaluation of whether initiatives affect actual patterns of HE entry (Evans, 2014b). Indeed, given current data, it is not possible to do so on a comprehensive basis. This problem could be addressed through the linking of an individual student number to UCAS applications and subsequent HE entry. Certainly, it is a matter of some urgency that effective methods are established to enable robust evaluation of alternative approaches to widening access.

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