

**Universities
Wales**
**Prifysgolion
Cymru**

Delivering for Wales:
The higher education priorities
for the future Welsh Government

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www.uniswales.ac.uk

About us

Universities Wales (Unis Wales) represents the interests of universities in Wales, and is a National Council of Universities UK. Unis Wales's membership encompasses the Vice Chancellors of all the universities in Wales, and the Director of the Open University in Wales.

Members of Unis Wales meet regularly throughout the academic year to discuss issues relating to higher education in Wales, and to decide upon collective positions and actions. The Committee agrees the strategic priorities for the work of Unis Wales.

Uni Wales's Constitution falls within the scope of the Articles of Association of Universities UK (UUK). The Chair of Unis Wales is an ex officio Vice President of UUK, a Trustee of UUK, and a member of the UUK Board and of its Executive Committee.

The Chair of Unis Wales is currently Professor Colin Riordan, President and Vice Chancellor of Cardiff University and the Vice Chair of Unis Wales is currently Mr Rob Humphreys, the Director of the Open University in Wales.

Our Members



Delivering for Wales:

The higher education priorities for the future Welsh Government

Universities in Wales are national assets that bring widespread benefits to individuals, communities, the nation as a whole and government in Wales:

Powering the Welsh economy

The higher education sector is one of Wales' most important industries, creating tens of thousands of jobs and stimulating substantial economic activity in local communities, as well as the wider Welsh economy. In 2014 Welsh universities generated £4.6 billion of output in Wales.

Growing Wales' skills base

Universities provide Wales with the best solution for growing the skills base of Wales' businesses and communities, through upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce and providing the highly-skilled graduates that are in considerable demand from employers. This in turn makes Wales an attractive proposition to employers looking to relocate or expand.

Creating fair opportunities

Universities are a catalyst for social mobility and continue to invest heavily to ensure that students, regardless of background, have access to good quality higher education that has the ability to change lives.

As we look to the future, universities, and the growing proportion of people studying at them, will be the key drivers to creating a globally competitive economy in Wales. Confidence in a growing economy will in turn, generate an environment that will foster greater creativity and prosperity in Wales - that will achieve the quality of life we aspire to – **a society where a world class health service, the elimination of poverty and a secure and rewarding future are available for all.** Universities have tremendous strength in their diversity, providing the capacity or potential capacity to be the main agent of change in Wales by creating a strong, knowledge-based economy and society.

Future policy decisions should be informed by robust evidence, be financially sustainable and as flexible and resilient as possible to external change. Changes in England have already had a significant effect on Welsh higher education and this is highly likely to continue following the recent publication of the UK Government's higher education green paper. Our universities need to be able to use their autonomous status to build international competitiveness for Wales. Universities Wales is asking therefore, that all political parties make the following minimum commitments ahead of the National Assembly for Wales' elections in May 2016. The current government was right to look to an independent panel to make recommendations for the long-term success and sustainability of the sector. We are therefore asking for these commitments from political parties in advance of the Autumn 2016 recommendations of the Diamond Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales.

In order to continue to deliver key outputs crucial to economic growth and social improvement in Wales, these are the **six fundamental commitments** to universities that should be a top priority for the next Welsh Government:

- 1** Provide means-tested maintenance grants for Welsh students from foundation through to postgraduate level to ensure that everyone in Wales has access to the life changing opportunities provided through higher education.
- 2** Prioritise university funding towards the policies that both provide opportunities to access an internationally competitive, high quality university education and deliver economic and social benefits for individuals, government and businesses in Wales.
- 3** Maintain in real terms the quality-related (QR) research budget that underpins Wales' world leading research.
- 4** Continue investment in part-time provision both to widen access to higher education and develop crucial skills within the Welsh workforce, mindful that part-time provision requires distinct support and investment in order to deliver for Wales.
- 5** Retain a funding and oversight body for higher education in Wales to manage risk and provide stability to the sector, provide assurance to Government and enable universities to continue delivering for Wales.
- 6** Actively support Wales remaining a member of the European Union.

1

Provide means-tested maintenance grants for Welsh students from foundation through to postgraduate level to ensure that everyone in Wales has access to the life changing opportunities provided through higher education.

Evidence has shown that students value maintenance support more highly than support for tuition fees. Increasing access to higher education in Wales in the current economic climate requires resource being redirected towards means-tested maintenance grants for Welsh students from foundation through to postgraduate level. According to a NUS-USI study, financial difficulties are pushing many students to the brink of 'dropping out'. Fifty-eight per cent of students regularly worry about not having enough money to meet their basic living expenses such as rent or utility bills.

Support for postgraduate students is crucial, particularly given the UK Government's announcement in the Autumn Statement of new support for postgraduate Masters degrees for English students from 2016/17. A thriving postgraduate community is critical for individuals, universities, businesses and government. It equips students with a higher level of skills and competencies to allow them to contribute and compete on the global stage and for universities it attracts world-leading research that has the ability to change lives. Businesses need the high-level and specialist skills that postgraduates bring, and in turn this is a significant attractor of international industry investment for government.



Case study

Kayleigh Hall, full time student in Health & Social Care at Cardiff Met, Llandaff Campus:

"When I was in school I didn't go very often, through personal difficulties at home, even though I really enjoyed education. I did a First Campus residential trip when I was fourteen, where we stayed at Cyncoed Campus and I really enjoyed it as it opened my eyes to how great university could be. I left with quite a few GCSE's but I still didn't think it would be enough to get into university.

After I left school I had two children and I went back to university at twenty-two. I did an Access course to get into University and attended a few of the open days, but I kept freezing. I think the turning point for me coming to University was the residential; it really helped, because at that point I thought it was only for people with a lot of money and for people who were highly educated and I really didn't think I would get that sort of chance. I did my Access course in College and I was absolutely adamant that I was going because I wanted to be the first one in my family to university and leave with a degree and that is what has happened, I'm the first one. I really fell in love with the course, I found it quite a broad subject and I enjoyed it. After I finish this degree I'm hoping to go on to a Masters, maybe in Child Psychology."

2

Prioritise university funding towards the policies that both provide opportunities to access an internationally competitive, high quality university education and deliver economic and social benefits for individuals, government and businesses in Wales.

Given changes to university and student funding in England in the last few years which have impacted on Wales, we now face a difficult choice: to provide a low cost education for all or to invest in high quality Welsh universities delivering a wide range of benefits across our communities for people and business. We do not believe a future Welsh government will be able to do both. By discontinuing a universal tuition fee grant which only supports full-time undergraduate students and by better targeting it towards those that need it most, funding can be prioritised towards higher education policies which equip our universities to deliver economic growth, greater social justice, and, crucially, a high quality university offering for students studying via all types of modes in Wales. High-cost subjects such as medicine, dentistry and the broader STEM subjects need to be properly funded so that Wales can compete not only in the UK, but on the world stage.

**Case study**

Jake Durham, graduate trombonist at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama:

“I am one of four children and come from what you would probably call a working class family. Nobody in my family had ever been to university so I had no one that I could chat to about university as even being an option for me.

Considering my family situation and circumstances, I didn't think that I could have afforded to have gone to University. Finance was a barrier to me at first partly because I didn't know anything about the grants and loans that were available but when I looked into this in more detail I realised that I could actually afford to go to university to study a degree because you don't pay your fees until after you graduate. People talk about the money and how expensive it is to go to university but I feel that I have taken full advantage of all the opportunities on offer and I really feel that I got my money's worth on my undergrad degree course. Now that I have graduated, I am desperate to provide a greater foundation for my career by going onto further study at postgraduate level. However, given that there is no government financial support available in Wales for postgraduate study in either grants or loans, I cannot even consider this as an option.”

3

Maintain in real terms the quality-related (QR) research budget that underpins Wales' world leading research.

Welsh universities have the highest percentage of world-leading research of any part of the UK in terms of its impact, with almost half of it considered to be having a direct transformational effect on society and the economy. Investing in Wales' research capacity is critical to ensuring that greater levels of competitive funding are secured, which will build on our excellent international reputation and expand quality research in Wales' universities for the economic, social and cultural benefit of Wales. It is essential that Wales invests to develop the critical mass of researchers and facilities it needs to attract top talent, and new funding sources. This in turn will provide confidence for creating mutually beneficial collaborations between universities, businesses and the public sector across the world. QR funding must continue to be distributed by a body independent of government, assuring that 'blue-skies' research is funded on the basis of excellence, the key to future success in applied research.



Case study

Reducing unnecessary attendance at hospital emergency departments by improving care out of hospital:

A programme of work by Professor Helen Snooks and her research team at Swansea University has reduced the number of people being taken to Emergency Departments (ED) by ambulance. A review led by Snooks reported that 40% of calls to emergency health services world-wide did not need an ambulance as they were not life-threatening or serious. In collaboration with ambulance service providers, policy makers and academics, the research team identified safe alternatives for transport to emergency departments, such as providing nurse advice over the phone or referral to non-emergency health services. In 2012-13 over 360,000 emergency calls were resolved through telephone advice, avoiding ambulance dispatch. As new models of ambulance service care are introduced in the UK and internationally in response to Professor Snooks' research, the proportion of emergency calls resulting in patient transport to hospital has fallen. This fell from 68% in 2007-8 to 55% in 2012-3, with estimated cost savings from avoided ambulance journeys alone of £24 million.

4

Continue investment in part-time provision both to widen access to higher education and develop crucial skills within the Welsh workforce, mindful that part-time provision requires distinct support and investment in order to deliver for Wales.

Part-time study plays a particularly important role in upskilling and reskilling agendas and should have a central role in any skills strategy. It provides an important way into higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, contributing significantly to the widening access agenda and to community development and economic regeneration in disadvantaged communities. The future government must be mindful that part time provision is a different offer made to a different student 'market' from those of full-time and therefore requires distinct support and investment in order to deliver at the high level of quality which universities provide.



Case study

James Frowen, aged 34 from Cardiff, has been a civil servant since 1998.

In his role as a Business Transformation Manager at Companies House, he is responsible for heading an initiative to merge the two largest operational areas within the organisation. As a trained facilitator and qualified coach, he has the additional responsibility of overseeing a Coaching Network. When considering his options for study, part time was the obvious choice for James as it allowed him to work full time and continue to provide for his family. He started studying in November 2009, completing his BA (Hons) Leadership & Management degree in April 2014. During this time, he managed his work in his day job, academic and family commitments, as well as continuing to carry out his role as a Community First Responder. James went on to win The Open University's Business School International Leadership and Management Student of the Year in 2014/15.

Case study

Part-time study was the perfect solution for Ann-Louise from Ely, Cardiff, aged 47 as she works part-time, is a single Mum and a carer to other family members. While volunteering in her daughter's school, Ann-Louise studied The Open University's Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning in Primary Schools to train to become a teaching assistant. Ann-Louise has now set her sights even higher and has progressed to studying a BA(hons) Childhood and Youth Development intending to specialise in supporting children with special needs.

5

Retain a funding and oversight body for higher education in Wales to manage risk and provide stability to the sector, provide assurance to Government and enable universities to continue delivering for Wales.

A funding body for higher education in Wales is crucial to providing a funding and regulatory role, which manages risk and provides stability to the sector. The independence of a funding body is critical to support university autonomy, which gives universities the freedom to invest, borrow and earn income. This ability to manage their own affairs is crucial for Welsh universities as independent earnings now form the bulk of income for some universities in the absence of large amounts of public investment. Nevertheless, government's responsibility to ensure that the trust and investment placed in the sector by students and other stakeholders would also be protected. An independent funding and oversight body is crucial for the long term sustainability of the HE sector in Wales to:

- Provide informed challenge and assurance on matters of quality, good governance and risk.
- Provide invaluable expertise and workable solutions to implementing government policy to the benefit of Wales' economy and society.



Case study

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has expertise that allows it to hit the ground running to secure intelligent, creative solutions to policy and funding challenges. HEFCW was able to implement the Welsh Government's new fees and funding regime for students from 2012, and brokered a solution to help keep public spending for students in check.

6

Actively support Wales remaining a member of the European Union.

The free movement of students and staff within the EU not only enriches the student experience, but also makes a vital contribution to the Welsh economy that is worth hundreds of millions of pounds. Furthermore, with many of our most frequent research partners coming from within the EU, non-membership could potentially damage our research base and have a detrimental effect on the contribution that our universities make in helping innovate in areas such as healthcare, and their role in driving future economic growth and prosperity. It is crucial that Wales remains in the EU to continue realising the significant benefits of EU membership to our universities and wider society.



Case study

EU-funded project, led by Bangor University has improved sustainable fisheries management and reduced wildlife crime:

Application of Bangor's DNA forensic research has had major impacts on the management and control of illegal wildlife trade. After initial work providing evidence for criminal prosecutions with wider deterrent effects on wildlife crime, Bangor-led research went on to apply these techniques to trace fish (products) to their source populations to ban illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices. Since 2009, this work has improved stock management by the UK government and European Commission, directly affected the Common Fisheries Policy reform and has been implemented by the Marine Stewardship Council as a verification tool for correct labelling of products.

Additional Publications

1

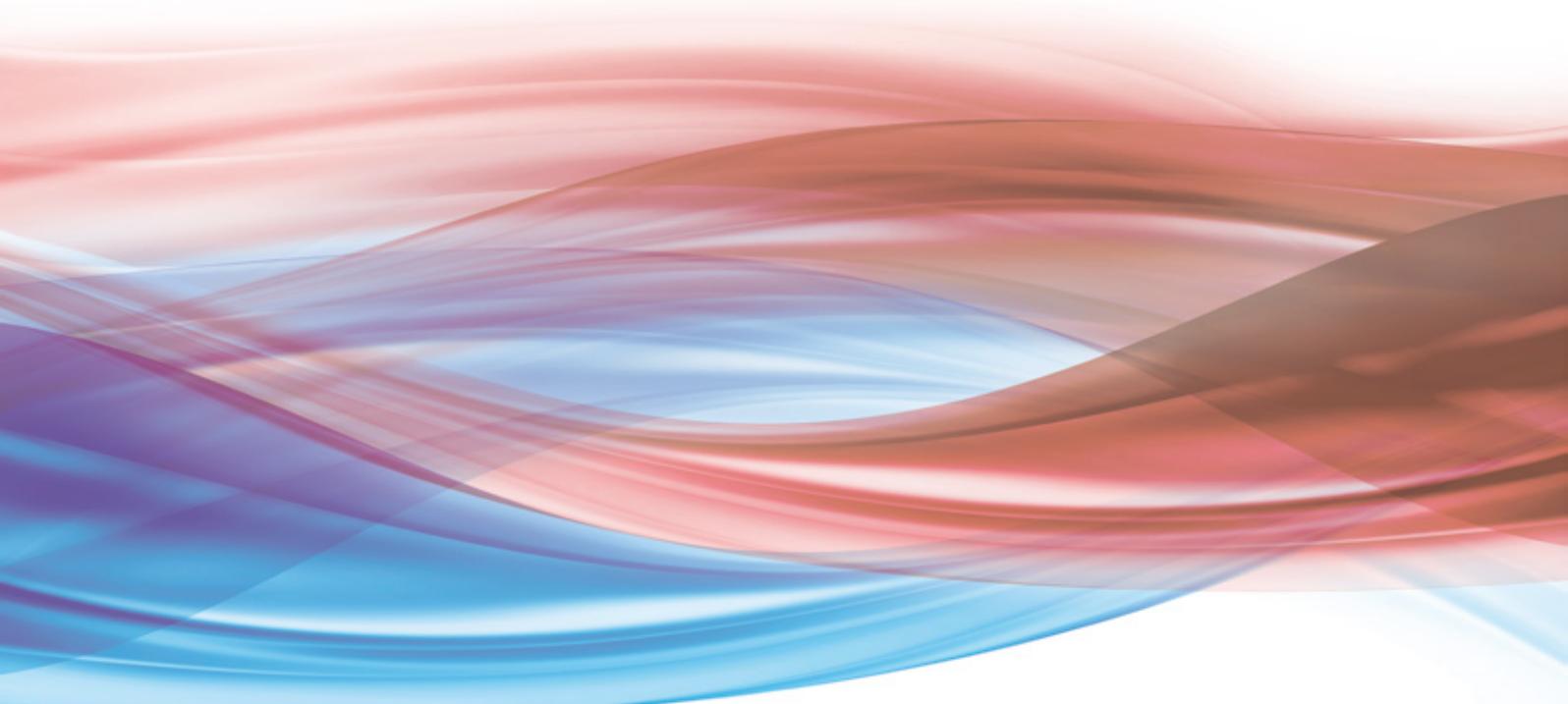
The Economic Impact of Higher Education in Wales:

www.uniswales.ac.uk/wp/media/The-Economic-Impact-of-Higher-Education-in-Wales.pdf

2

The Economic Impact of International Students in Wales:

www.uniswales.ac.uk/wp/media/The-Economic-Impact-of-International-Students-in-Wales.pdf



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