

Universities Wales response to the Senedd Cymru's Children, Young People and Education Committee's consultation; Scrutiny of Covid-19 and its impact on children and young people (including students in further and higher education).

About Universities Wales

Universities Wales represents the interests of universities in Wales, and is a National Council of Universities UK. Universities Wales's membership encompasses the Vice Chancellors of all the universities in Wales, and the Director of the Open University in Wales. Our mission is to support a university education system which transforms lives through the work Welsh universities do with the people and places of Wales and the wider world.

Summary

- The number one priority for universities continues to be the health and wellbeing of students and staff. Universities UK, with support and contribution from Universities Wales, has produced principles and considerations for emerging from lockdown. This work informs both the plans universities are making ahead of the autumn term as well as the discussions that we have had with Welsh Government and HEFCW.
- Universities will have a crucial role to play in Wales' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as the economic role that universities play across Wales — supporting jobs and the foundational economy — universities also offer social and cultural continuity for communities across Wales including in the use of facilities, outreach programmes and arts programmes.
- The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that education and particularly universities will be among the most impacted by Covid-19.
- The scale of the financial challenges facing the Welsh higher education sector is severe and threatens the ability of Welsh universities to continue to deliver the significant economic benefits to all parts of Wales, world leading research and the UK's highest student satisfaction. Current estimates indicate that the Covid-19 outbreak may result in an income loss between £200m and £400m to Welsh universities in academic year 2020/21. It is also estimated that there is a reduction in income of between approximately £80 million and £90 million to universities in the period to end July 2020.
- These estimates only take account of the direct financial impact on universities, not the indirect economic impact that will be felt in Wales as a result of a reduction in university or activity. For example, universities generate £5bn of output, £500m of export earnings and nearly 50,000 jobs.
- There are also wider consequences than the direct and indirect financial impact. For example, there are a number of subject areas important to Wales' prosperity that have a high proportion of international students on

those courses. A reduction in international students could mean that those subject areas are no longer viable unless there is replacement funding. For example, in 2018/19, at postgraduate level in Wales international students made up 39% of engineering students, 40% of computer science students, 35% of mathematics students.

- To preserve the sector, and the benefits universities bring to Wales, it is vital that a full package of support is developed by the UK and devolved governments. For example, if research and innovation infrastructure in Wales is not preserved, it could take decades to rebuild what is lost and the associated benefits for Wales.
- Universities are making the most of existing government support schemes, but these have not proven straightforward and their eligibility criteria is not necessarily reflective of the diverse and complex make up of universities' staff structures and funding mechanisms. For example, universities in Wales are not commercial entities but registered charities with a duty of care to protect and use their assets for charitable purposes.
- We are now reaching a point of urgency. Without additional support the sector will have to imminently make difficult decisions in keeping with the governance and financial requirements placed upon them as charities and as institutions regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.
- Welsh universities are working closely with the Quality Assurance Agency to ensure that as little disruption occurs as possible as a result of the transition from classroom-based teaching to remote provision, and that this provision remains of the highest quality.
- There remains uncertainty about the future economic prospects of the UK including in areas such as employment. Universities Wales is supporting work being coordinated by Universities UK to explore how these impacts from Covid-19 can be mitigated, including how we can further support the employability of students and graduates.
- Universities are continuing to work hard with their existing resources to support students across a range of areas including augmenting hardship funds and putting in place other support and resources to help students in accessing their learning and assessments.
- The loss of seasonal and part time work is something that Welsh institutions are aware of and are working with affected students to support them. But the scale of the impact on graduate entry to the labour market is challenging and will be difficult for universities to mitigate on their own.
- The current environment is fast-moving and the issues outlined in this response may change in a matter of days or weeks. We will keep the committee informed of developments as and when they happen.

Higher and further education, including the financial sustainability of the sector, the effect of changes to courses, student accommodation and other student services, and the impact of this on students' legal rights.

The health and safety of universities' staff and students remains the number one priority and universities are working hard to support students throughout the duration of this crisis. Universities UK, with support and contribution from Universities Wales, has produced principles and considerations for emerging from lockdown¹. The principles and considerations provide a framework for individual universities to adapt to their own institutional settings and contexts. This work informs both the plans universities are making ahead of the autumn term as well as the discussions that we have had with Welsh Government and HEFCW.

The Office for Budget Responsibility's [analysis](#) suggests that education, in particular universities, will be the sector most severely impacted by the Covid-19 crisis.

There are range of estimates for the financial impact the pandemic will have on the sector in Wales. This range reflects the difficulty of predicting recruitment patterns in 2020/21. However, all point to a major income loss from fee income alone and, once continuing students and other losses are taken into account, current estimates indicate that the Covid-19 outbreak may result in an income loss between £200m and £400m to Welsh universities in academic year 2020/21. It is also estimated that there is a reduction in income of between approximately £80 million and £90 million to universities in the period to end July 2020.

These figures do not include the impact that will be felt as a result of a reduction in the wider economic benefits of universities, staff and students on local communities.

The scale of the financial challenge facing the Welsh higher education sector is not to be underestimated and without support it could take decades to recover from the possible impact that Covid-19 will have the sector. Financial instability in the higher education sector would affect current and prospective students, impacting on areas from financial support, to capital investment, from teaching and learning, research and innovation.

The impact will be wider than university activity. Welsh universities are proportionally more impact to the economy in Wales than the university sector across the UK is to the UK economy. According to independent analysis, universities in Wales generate nearly 50,000 jobs and around £5bn of output. Any reduction in income, including as a result of falling student numbers, will also impact the wider economic benefits of universities including on the foundational economy and jobs².

¹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/principles-considerations-emerging-lockdown-uk-universities-june-2020.aspx>

² http://www.uniswales.ac.uk/media/UNI010-Economic-Impact-Report_FINAL.pdf

In 2019, Wales had the highest overall student satisfaction in the UK and [led the other UK nations](#) across a range of areas in the National Student Survey, notably student satisfaction, course quality and student voice. Additionally, Welsh universities contribute heavily to world leading research and innovation. [Welsh research](#) is cited 68% more than the global average and receives more citations per \$1 million of research investment than any other country.

Therefore, the impact of a financial shock to the sector on this scale, without government support, could have implications for Wales' world-leading performance in these areas.

A possible reduction in international students has wider consequences than the direct and indirect financial impact. For example, a number of subjects crucial to the Welsh economy are reliant on large numbers of international students to be viable. A reduction in international students could pose challenges to the continued delivery of those subjects which would subsequently impact the supply of those very high levels skills in Wales.. For example, at postgraduate level in Wales international students make up:

- 39% of engineering students
- 40% of computer science students
- 35% of mathematics students

To preserve the sector, and the benefits universities bring to Wales, it is vital that a full package of support is developed by the UK and devolved governments.

Universities are making the most of existing government support schemes, but these have not proven straightforward and their eligibility criteria is not necessarily reflective of the diverse and complex make up of universities' staff structures and funding mechanisms. For example, universities in Wales are not commercial entities but registered charities with a duty of care to protect and use their assets for charitable purposes.

We are now reaching a point of urgency. Without additional support the sector will have to imminently make difficult decisions in keeping with the governance and financial requirements placed upon them as charities and as institutions regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

The risk to the sector in Wales is compounded by the possible impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. There remain many unanswered questions about the transition period in particular what replacement funding for European Structural Funds will be available. There are currently no commitments from governments as to whether projects can and will be funded should there be any gaps between EU and replacement schemes. This is now an urgent matter, especially given the challenges that Welsh higher education faces as a result of Covid-19.

Student financial support including the impact on students who have lost their part-time employment.

Universities have been hard at work, adapting and augmenting existing support mechanisms for students in the wake of Covid-19 and anticipating the need for continued support.

Many universities took the decision to allow students to exit their accommodation early at no cost to the student. Universities now face a loss of income of around £35 million this term due to accommodation, conferencing and catering services.

Where students have chosen to remain in their accommodation, universities have been working to support them as best possible, delivering food and other essential supplies to students in need and maintaining regular contact to ensure the students' health and well-being.

As mentioned below, extensive work has been done around ensuring students have access to hardship funds across Welsh universities. There has also been a process of adapting funding to make it quicker for students to access.

The physical and mental health of children and young people.

The National Union of Students "[Coronavirus and Students](#)" survey shows exceptionally high levels of concern within respondents across a range of areas:

- 95% of students are concerned about the wider economy
- 81% are worried about their job prospects
- 65% are worried about their applications for jobs and university/college

At a time of relative uncertainty, it is increasingly important that Welsh and UK Governments are able to put in place measures to support the higher education sector and in doing so, provide prospective and current students with reassurance.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, children in need, looked after children and children eligible for free school meals).

Children's services, including social care and safeguarding.

Early childhood education and care, including impact on the childcare market and childhood development.

Statutory school education, including arrangements for remote learning, continuity of learning, the impact on educational outcomes and the implementation of the critical workers policy.

Universities are playing a key role in supporting not only their own students' education, but in the wider national effort. Welsh universities are working with regional stakeholders to support the move to online learning in schools:

- Universities in Wales have been working with Welsh Government to create online learning experiences and events for learners in Year 13. The post-16 distance learning resources are accessible via [the Hwb](#), the digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales. These resources are being made available early to enable learners to carry on with their learning and prepare to transition to higher education. The vast amount of resources have been developed by universities, colleges and other organisations, and include online lectures, master classes and tutorials. They also include information about university life, wellbeing, and information for parents and carers.
- Students from Cardiff Metropolitan University's School of Education and Social Policy have come together to create a free homeschool programme for parents affected by the recent Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Around 30 Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students have devised a weekly programme of activities designed for Key Stage 3 (KS3) learners, delivered through Microsoft's Teams and OneNote programmes. From English to Physics, learners have the opportunity to conduct experiments using household items as well as a range of weekly activities that can be done with parents.
- The Open University in Wales has been working with Cardiff Council Schools' Service to identify resources that can help teachers to support learners at home online, mainly through OpenLearn and FutureLearn. The resources will explore how to upskill teachers to use the pedagogical approaches needed to facilitate distance learning online and to convert some of the best content into online packages. The partnership project between the Council and The Open University is the first of its kind in Wales and will provide support, advice and training to teachers on ways to implement distance learning.
- The MFL Student Mentoring Project has created a series of online resources on the Hwb. The project is run by Cardiff University in partnership with Bangor University, Swansea University and Aberystwyth University. The resources have been designed for Year 13 pupils to explore a variety of languages and cultures in readiness for University life. There are a range of live Seminars and Lectures as well as a series of Language Classes and Resources. Each week will have a unique theme and will be led by either a university academic, a university student or a member of the Welsh Government-funded Languages Project, the MFL Student Mentoring Project. There is also information about what the study of languages looks like at different Welsh Universities.

Exams and qualifications (including vocational qualifications).

Universities in Wales are doing all they can to support students to achieve their learning outcomes and progress. Measures taken include moving assessments online where possible (depending on academic discipline); introducing alternate measures of assessment; and amendments to exam questions if sections of a syllabus have been missed.

This is a difficult situation for students in their final year in particular, and a variety of options and approaches are being used at individual institutions to ensure as many students as possible are supported to graduate this year and in a way that ensures a fair and consistent approach throughout.

We know that some students will require greater support or for suitable alternative arrangements to be made to online provision, and universities are being as accommodating as they can and, on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the individual students' circumstances and preferences.

The QAA is also regularly updating [guidance](#) to support providers in maintaining academic standards and quality and has noted that there is unlikely to be "a single approach or solution that will fit all modules, courses or departments".

Universities Wales are also engaged in a UK-wide piece of work led by UUK aimed at exploring options to support recent and future graduates. The work group are considering what universities can do with their current capacity to help support graduates entering the labour market. They are also working to identify whether there is any support that governments and businesses can provide to help ensure that recent and future generations of graduates are supported as best possible.

Youth work.

Support available for the workforce, including (but not limited to) health, social care, education, children's services, and youth workers.

Universities have been playing a critical role in the national effort, supporting a range of initiatives in collaboration with the health and social care system.

Aberystwyth University is working with a group in Machynlleth to produce more PPE to protect health and social care workers from Covid-19. As a result of the partnership with local group Dyfi PPE, academics and staff at the university are laser cutting materials into a specified shape. The parts from the university will be assembled by a Welsh firm into visors. This collaboration has been developed as part of the European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) Project Centre for Photonics Expertise project, in which Aberystwyth is a partner.

2000+ student nurses & midwives who have opted in to work in clinical settings in Wales during this challenging time. Another example of fantastic teamwork with **Bangor University, the University of South Wales, Cardiff University and Swansea University**, supporting the nursing & midwifery workforce.

Social Care Wales have given programmes permission to exercise discretion on practice learning requirements and to do what is needed to support students in placement while ensuring sufficiency and robustness of practice learning. Most partners (local authorities and voluntary organisations) and sponsors, however, are working in collaboration with the **Open University in Wales** to support students' learning even if they are called back to the front line.

Nursing lecturers at the College of Human & Health Sciences at **Swansea University** have launched PurpleAid to support pre-reg nursing undergraduates experiencing financial difficulties through not being able to carry out Bank or part-time work. The staff are offering to buy and deliver essential items to those students who are struggling.

Social work students from Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences have taken on voluntary and paid roles in various caring roles to help local authorities care for vulnerable people.

Swansea University's College of Human & Health Sciences is carrying out critical care training for non-critical care staff for Swansea Bay and Hywel Dda university health boards over the next 4 weeks, manual handling training for Swansea Bay, intermediate life support training for Hywel Dda and are in negotiation with the health boards about what other training they require.

University of South Wales is continuing to train NHS nurses in our facilities, and will be training hundreds of non-critical care staff who are working in critical care. The academic and clinical skills team are delivering this training, which is already underway. Training videos have also been filmed in the Clinical Simulation Centre to demonstrate how to use ventilators.

Frontline housing workers, homelessness support services and the people they look after, many of whom are vulnerable, are the latest groups to be using hand sanitiser made at **Swansea University**, where a solar tech lab has temporarily switched to producing 5000 litres a week during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Swansea University nursing students say they are proud to be able to face the challenge of joining the NHS during the pandemic. More than 700 nursing students from Swansea University opted to take on clinical roles and have begun caring for Welsh patients this week

The University of South Wales is working with university health boards to provide non critical care staff with ITU skills to aid the current situation in which the NHS is finding itself.

A leading **Swansea University** clinician is among a group of experts calling for the introduction of a risk assessment for frontline health professionals treating coronavirus patients. The study - Risk stratification for healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic – examined the demographics of those who had been hospitalised and ultimately died due to COVID-19 compared to the general population.

Doctor Tom Slater from **Cardiff University** has joined a group of academics to investigate the impact of covid-19 pandemic on family carers. The “Caring through Coronavirus” study will seek to understand how family carers are coping during the pandemic and explore whether changes in policy, legislation, and health and social care provision are impacting their wellbeing and caring responsibilities.

Parents and carers.

Children’s rights.