

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 34

Ymateb gan : Prifysgolion Cymru

Response from : Universities Wales

Universities Wales response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee - Committee Priorities for the Fifth Assembly Consultation

1.1 Universities Wales represents the interests of all the universities in Wales. Its membership encompasses the Vice Chancellors of all eight universities in Wales, and the Director of the Open University in Wales. This response sets out what Universities Wales considers the priorities should be for the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee to consider during the Fifth Assembly.

1.2 Universities are an integral part of Wales' economy and society, impacting upon, and providing many benefits to the people of Wales beyond their students. Whilst issues that are a high priority for the next 12 months have been identified in this response - such as university funding and the Diamond Review - other areas have also been highlighted where universities can have a positive impact on the many areas covered by this Committee. Furthermore, Universities Wales engaged positively with the Committee in the past, and therefore the recommendations of the legacy report have also been carefully considered in our response. One aspect that was noted in the legacy report was the Assembly's agreement to alter the remit of the Committee to include Higher Education in 2014 but for Higher Education to also be included in the remit of the Enterprise and Business Committee. We understand this arrangement is due to continue and welcome this decision, looking forward to an active role within both Committees.

2. Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements

2.1. We agree with the recommendations of the Committee's legacy report that scrutinising Welsh Government's response to the Review's recommendations should be an immediate and high priority for the CYPE Committee. The Review, chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond, has had cross-party support during the last Assembly term and the

final recommendations, due in autumn 2016, have the potential to solve some tough problems facing our universities. We look forward to working across political boundaries to find an implementable solution that supports our students and universities.

2.2. Ensuring early implementation of the recommendations, particularly in light of the uncertainty brought about by the vote to leave the EU and in the context of the 2017/18 budget discussions, will be crucial if we are to capitalise on the widespread benefits that universities bring to individuals, communities, government and the nation as a whole.

3. Welsh Government Budget for Higher Education 2017/18

3.1. We anticipate that scrutiny of Welsh Government's budget will be another immediate and high priority for the CYPE Committee. We would like to highlight that scrutiny of the budget will need to be considered in conjunction with the proposed recommendations and timelines for implementation of funding to the sector from the Diamond Review. Against the backdrop of six successive years of major cuts to the HE budget, with a total reduction of £365m or 81% since 2010/11, we were grateful to the previous Committee for examining the Welsh Government's Higher Education Budget 2016/17 and making recommendations to the Finance Committee on their concerns. We are happy to provide you with any information to assist with the next budget round.

4. Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET)

4.1. Universities in Wales are committed to a collaborative approach to deliver initial teacher education that gives teachers themselves the skills, knowledge and dispositions to lead the changes that are needed. We have the expertise to help shape the new policies required to develop the planned new system of accredited Initial Teacher Education and Training.

5. Widening Access

5.1. Universities across Wales are committed to widening access - increasing opportunities for people from a diverse range of backgrounds to higher education - and firmly believe that every person, regardless of circumstance, should have the opportunity to access a higher level learning experience that is appropriate, relevant and valuable. The success in Wales in widening access to date has grown from the determination and expertise in our universities to offer students opportunities to study full and part time at the pace and with the support that suits them. The Committee should be aware of the substantial and wide-ranging initiatives that are being delivered by universities across Wales. In addition to the substantial work of our

universities with young people and schools, they are also delivering workshops in the community, 'science for adults' sessions and support for care leavers and foster parents. However, we also recognise that it is time to review and extend the role of universities in reaching out to communities in Wales. We are committed playing a significant part in a wider approach across Welsh Government to bring about better social cohesion in our communities, bringing people together and brokering community relationships based on shared values, regardless of age, gender, race or religion. We are proud of our successes, but we can do more to embrace and appreciate the cultural and social diversity of the communities within which we sit.

6. Skills Strategy

6.1. Whilst we understand that skills are within the remit of the EIS Committee, they will undoubtedly also be of interest to the CYPE Committee with regard to creating opportunities for Wales' children and young people. Universities are central to skills development, including pathways other than a traditional, full-time undergraduate degree. For example, universities have been delivering high-quality, work-related education for many years in the form of employer sponsored qualifications and a host of other qualifications that can be delivered via part time routes. As such we have considerable expertise and well-established infrastructure to contribute to the delivery of apprenticeships. The Committee should consider the contribution of universities in developing a sustainable, long-term, joint approach to delivering skills policy that will support the future generation in Wales.

7. Review of the Regulation and Oversight of Post-Compulsory Education and Training in Wales

7.1. The Higher Education (Wales) Act provides for a revised regulatory and governance framework for higher education in Wales. It reformed the functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and aims to ensure robust and proportionate regulation of higher education institutions in Wales. We agree with the recommendation of the Committee's legacy report that any successor Committee should consider the implications of the outcome of the Diamond Review for the new system of governance within the higher education sector established by the Act. By doing this, several of the issues raised by the Review of the Regulation and Oversight of Post-Compulsory Education and Training in Wales (Hazelkorn Review) will already be addressed. We are not convinced, therefore, that further legislation is necessary or productive, given the pressing delivery requirements right across the education sector in the current uncertain environment.

7.2. Further, we would strongly urge the Committee to be particularly vigilant about any potential legislation that would affect universities'

national accounting classification. Universities are officially classified as Non Profit Institutions serving Households NPISH). If any proposed changes risked reclassification as 'central government', this could potentially have a very damaging impact on the international reputation of the sector. Furthermore, if universities lost NPISH status and became part of the public sector then it would also be necessary for the universities affected to conduct a comprehensive review of all their contracts and legal agreements with third parties. Most significantly, this would transfer financial risk to Government as any university surpluses and losses would become Welsh Government funds and would have to be managed within their overall budget.

We thank you for the opportunity for early input and look forward to continuing our positive relationship with the Committee over the next term and offer our support to you as you consider the priorities over the next period.

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