

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau/ Economy, Infrastructure and Skills  
Committee  
Bargeinion Dinesig ac Economiâu Rhanbarthol Cymru / City Deals and the  
Regional Economies of Wales  
Ymateb gan Y Brifysgol Agored / Evidence from Open University

**About The Open University in Wales**

1. The Open University (OU) was established in 1969, with its first students enrolling in 1971. It is a world-leader in providing innovative and flexible distance learning opportunities at higher education (HE) level. It is open to people, places, methods and ideas. It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.
2. Over 7,000 students across Wales are currently studying with The Open University, enrolled on around 10,000 modules. There are OU students in every National Assembly for Wales constituency and we are the nation's leading provider of undergraduate part-time higher education. Almost three out of four Open University students are in employment while they study and with an open admissions policy, no qualifications are necessary to study at degree level. Over a third of our undergraduate students in Wales join us without standard university entry level qualifications.
3. As a world leader in educational technology, our vast 'open content' portfolio includes free study units on the free online learning platform [OpenLearn](#) (including many Wales-related materials and our Welsh Language platform [OpenLearn Cymru](#)) and substantial content on YouTube and on iTunes U where we have recorded over 70 million downloads.
4. The Open University in Wales welcomes the chance to submit comments to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee in respect of City Deals and the regional economy. While we are not in a position to comment on all of the inquiry areas we hope the following observations will be useful to the committee. We have set out our responses below with reference to the inquiry terms of reference.

***The current position with regard to the signed Cardiff Capital Region and Swansea Bay City Deals and the next steps planned to take them forward.***

5. We welcome these City Deal collaborative approaches to stimulate economic growth but there is a risk that the mechanisms to identify skills needs of the City Deal areas cut across or duplicate similar mechanisms in the current regional bodies – North Wales Economic Ambition Board, South West Regional Learning Partnership and LSKIP. Clarity and synergy would be welcome.

***The intended impact of the City Deals and the way in which this will be governed, funded and monitored***

6. Transparency of processes and relationships should be a priority, allowing the public to understand the flow of funding and decision making, and enabling organisations to engage in a meaningful way.

***The potential benefits offered by a possible Growth Deal for North Wales***

7. The Growth Deal for North Wales has the potential to build on the sound foundations developed by the North Wales Economic Ambitions Board.

***The extent to which a similar growth deal approach could be of benefit to Mid Wales***

8. A more distinct focus on the needs of the almost exclusively rural mid Wales must be welcomed, but the limited number of significant anchor companies and high added value businesses within the area could pose challenges around governance structures led by the private sector.

***The degree to which the growth and city deals could solve or exacerbate existing inequalities, both within and between regions***

9. They have the potential both solve or exacerbate inequalities within and between regions unless infrastructure and communications investment maximise the impact of public transport or remote digital access for those resident disadvantaged communities to benefit from economic hubs.

***The degree to which the growth and city deals co-ordinate with Welsh Government strategy***

10. The current positive relationships and shared vision between Welsh Government and the three current regional partnerships around learning and skills need to be built on within the growth and city deal initiatives.

**Other remarks**

11. There is a significant opportunity to use City Deals and regional economic partnerships to identify skills gaps and prioritise investment in building the workforce. This will involve the need to upskill and reskill the existing workforce and in order to do this flexible, distance learning has a significant role to play. The Open University in Wales, as a pan-Wales institution, is uniquely placed to be able to engage with all City deal and regional partnerships and is keen to do so.