

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak
on children and young people in Wales

COV 120
Ymateb gan: Undeb Prifysgol a Choleg Cymru
(UCU Cymru)

COV 120
Response from: University and College Union
(UCU Wales)

I am writing to you as I am unable to attend the committee meeting and I want to ensure that you and your committee colleagues are sighted on the very real implications of the Covid Crisis on the post 16 sector in Wales.

FUNDING

It will impact on both FE and HE institutions; in FE we believe the Work Based Learning (WBL) funding is likely to be cut by about 5% in the coming academic year, which will have a consequential impact on the staffing levels. This will vary across FE institutions as the impact will depend on the size of the WBL offer.

However the impact on HE, we believe, will be significant. UCU commissioned work from London Economics, looking at the potential impact on the finances of Welsh HEIs under-recruitment due to Covid 19. The conclusion is quite stark and please bear in mind that this is looking solely at students, HEIs have other income streams which will also be affected. The report argues that

*“In particular, the analysis estimates that the combined direct, indirect and induced economic impacts of the activities of the 8 Welsh higher education institutions declines from **£4,591 million** to approximately **£4,347 million** (a reduction of approximately **£244 million**). In terms of employment losses, the reduction in institutional activity would be expected to result in approximately **2,545** job losses, of which approximately **1,230** occurring directly in higher education institutions, with a further **1,315** jobs lost throughout institutions’ local, regional and national supply chains.” (p16)*

HEFCW have shared with us a copy of their written submission so I won’t repeat their figures.

We would urge you and your colleagues to do whatever you can to raise this matter in the Senedd to ensure that the Welsh government do all they can to invest in post 16 and ready the sector to deal with the significant projected levels of unemployment in Wales, as a result of Covid19.

Engagement with the Government

UCU wishes to publicly thank the Minister and SHELL officials for their meaningful engagement throughout this difficult period. Working in Social Partnership in Wales has delivered genuine benefits to all the stake holders in post 16 sector education and training, in stark contrast to what I see happening to my colleagues who work in England.

In Wales, we agreed joint protocols for a return to FE on 15th with Colegau Cymru and the government officials have provided appropriate opportunities to comment and request amendments to that advice for both FE & WBL and HE guidance.

Structures have been created to ensure that work can be taken forward over the summer period to ready the sector for the start of the next academic year. We are confident that working in partnership as we have done thus far will produce effective and workable solutions for the post 16 sector in Wales.

Engagement with Employers

As I've said previously, we now have 45 protocols in place for a safe return to the workplace in FE to allow staff to help students complete their licence to practice assessment. Those protocols are based in articulating what the various health and safety regulation require of employers and ensuring that students and staff have access to information and explanations about the safe systems of working being introduced in the FE sector.

In the post 16 space we are discussing the continuity of learning with officials, institutional reps, Universities Wales, NUS, HEFCW, Colegau Cymru, QAA, NTfW, Learning and Work and Careers Wales. UCU are confident that the government are responding in a timely manner, given the uncertainty that exists about the health implications of Covid and the Test Trace and Protect policy of Welsh Government.

As yet we have received no notices of compulsory redundancy from any of the post 16 employers in Wales. Only one institution, Cardiff University, has tabled a request to consider cuts to terms and conditions to achieve cost savings in the coming financial year. We are expecting, that once recruitment figures are known in late October that there will be a raft of redundancy notices issued to the trade unions.

In Summary

It feels like the calm before the storm. There are significant challenges facing the sector, we must find the finance to invest in the post 16 sector to ensure the post 16 sector in Wales can play a full role in a Welsh economic recovery. One important lesson from all this that we would like to the committee to consider is that the government must put digital capacity, literacy and provision of equipment front and centre of its spending in the next budget round.