

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

**CYPE SP 38**

**Ymateb gan: Y Brifysgol Agored yng Nghymru**

**Response from: The Open University in Wales**

---

Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

### **Thema 1: Addysg oedran ysgol | Theme 1: School-age education**

#### **Flexible provision**

You will be familiar with the OU in Wales' innovative and flexible PGCE programme. As noted below, we would welcome your attention to how flexible and alternative routes into the professions, including teaching, can be further developed and expanded.

### **Thema 2: Addysg bellach ac addysg uwch | Theme 2: Further and higher education**

#### **The role of learning in our recovery from COVID-19**

In the immediate term, we would welcome the Committee's attention to the role of learning – to include adult community learning/lifelong learning as well as higher education provision and skills development – in Wales' recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.



We would encourage you to work with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee on this work and to consider not only the importance of learning to our recovery over the next year or so, but also what role learning has to play in the longer term.

We would particularly encourage you to consider how increased flexibility can be built in to our post-16 learning system, and how providers can be supported to develop their provision in a way that responds to the socioeconomic challenges Wales was already facing before the pandemic, but which have been accelerated and exacerbated by the pandemic.

These may include, but are not limited to, such challenges as our ageing population and the growth of automation. Social injustice and inequity were already a significant problem in many of our communities, and these risk becoming even more entrenched as a result of the pandemic.

As people live longer, more people will want and/or need to change careers more regularly throughout their lives. As the economy changes as a result of the pandemic, the UK's exit from the EU, technological advancement, and the climate crisis, different sectors of the economy will contract and grow. We would like you to consider the extent to which our skills sector is able to respond to these challenges, and to make recommendations.

We believe that enhancing access to learning is of paramount importance in breaking down barriers and inequities, and would welcome your consideration of how the power of learning can be levered to help foster social justice, tackle poverty and inequality, and promote prosperity.

### **Higher learning in our post-Covid economy**

Together with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, we would encourage you to consider the extent to which the dominant full-time model of higher education delivery is fit-for-purpose in our post-Covid economy.

While we do not necessarily know specifically how the economy will change during the coming years, we can be certain that it will change. Not least as a result of the pandemic and following the UK's exit from the EU, the nature of work will change, and the skills and knowledge required in the economy will change.

It is essential, as the economy evolves, that we ensure that our development is inclusive of people of all backgrounds, including socioeconomic backgrounds, and identities. We would welcome your attention to the question of whether or not the



dominant model of higher education is sufficiently flexible to do that in the longer term.

We would particularly encourage you to consider the extent to which it is sufficiently flexible to embrace different types of learners, widen access to the professions, and to cope with and respond to changing learner demand, as well as the requirements of the economy itself.

### **Enhancing flexible HE provision**

Similarly, we believe it would be helpful for you to consider the future role of flexibility in higher learning provision more generally.

You will be familiar with the OU's flexible model, which has led to significant growth across the country and particularly positive growth in some of Wales' most underprivileged communities. You will be further familiar with the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, which is due to be introduced during the Autumn term, as well as the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill being considered at Westminster.

Now would be an opportune moment for you to consider the importance of flexibility in our higher education system, the development of modular learning and new provision such as microcredentials, and to make recommendations as to what steps might be taken to promote flexibility.

Together with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, we would encourage you to give consideration to the importance of flexible approaches to work-based learning, including the continue development of higher and degree apprenticeships, and to consider how flexible and alternative routes into the professions can be developed.

### **Part-time HE provision**

During this Senedd, we would also encourage you to give attention to the position and sustainability of part-time higher education provision.

You will be aware of the enormous growth in take-up of study with the OU in Wales since the reform of the student finance system in 2018; you may also be aware that growth in the sector is being sustained by us.

The OU's main offer is part-time study and it is in that kind of provision that we have over 50 years of experience. For many other providers, a part-time offer is secondary to their full-time provision. While we have seen the positive impact of student-side reform of funding and finance system, we have yet to realise the potential positive



impacts on the provider-side and, in order to do this, providers need to be encouraged and/or incentivised to develop their part-time provision.

We would like you to consider what additional assistance and incentivisation (financial and otherwise) should be made available to support providers and encourage growth.

### **Pathways to higher learning**

You will know that there is a wide range of provision and methods of delivery across the sector, and across all levels of study. In some cases, the pathways from lower levels of learning (e.g. levels 1-3) may lead directly to higher levels (e.g. level 5 and higher), but, in many cases, they do not.

This may be especially true when considering the gap between learning at levels 1-3 and the likelihood to pursue study at higher education level in the same field. It is widely recognised that pursuing progressively higher levels of learning is a key contributor to tackling poverty and enhancing prosperity; we further believe that clear pathways from lower levels of study to higher learning would help foster a sense that learning is a lifelong pursuit.

We would therefore welcome your attention to the extent to which learning pathways, as they are currently constituted, facilitate learners progressing to higher levels of study. We would encourage you to look across all sectors, modes of study, and methods of provision, and to give particular consideration to underrepresented groups of learners.

### **Thema 3: Iechyd a lles, gan gynnwys gofal cymdeithasol (i'r graddau y maent yn ymwneud â phlant a phobl ifanc) | Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)**

#### **The role of learning in building a better society**

We would welcome your attention to the wider benefits of learning on society. There is considerable academic writing which establishes a link between access to learning and, for example, improved community cohesion, reduced crime, and improved health outcomes, but little if any of this has considered the unique context of Wales.

As well as these multiplier effects, we would encourage you to consider how learning can be leveraged in order to achieve wider societal goals, such as encouraging active citizenship and participation in democracy among our population, addressing the



climate emergency and promoting the sustainable development principle, and reducing poverty and inequality and promoting the principle of social justice in our communities.

### **Flexible provision**

As noted earlier, we would welcome your attention to flexible routes into the professions, including the allied professions and social care, can be expanded and promoted.

### **Thema 4: Plant a phobl Ifanc | Theme 4: Children and young people**

As noted above, we would welcome your attention to the multiplier effects of learning, particularly in relation to fostering a sense of active citizenship among children and young people.

We would also welcome your attention to the extent to which our education system encourages and enables a culture of continuous, lifelong learning.

