

**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 49**

**Ymateb gan: Sophie Douglas, Prifysgol Cymru**

**Response from: Sophie Douglas, Universities Wales**

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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**

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

**Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill**

Universities Wales understands that the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill is set to be laid before the Senedd this year. Universities Wales would welcome the opportunity to support the Committee in its scrutiny of the Bill.

Given the challenges that Wales is expected to face as a result of the pandemic and the wider challenges of climate change and the changing workplace, ensuring that universities are empowered to continue to deliver locally, regionally and nationally will be crucial in ensuring we mitigate these challenges.

Higher education in Wales is a significant economic driver, generating over £5bn of output per year. Universities provide employment across Wales, and collaborate with small and medium sized businesses on research and innovation projects, as well as undertaking world-leading research in fields such as climate change and biosciences. Welsh universities draw in vital income to Wales through international research



partnerships, and are recognised for their excellence, bringing leading academics to work in Wales. It is therefore essential that legislative developments impacting the higher education sector take this into account.

We have been broadly supportive of the development of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill through the consultative process. For higher education in Wales, there are a number of key priorities for the Bill including:

- Research and innovation - ensuring R&I in Wales is well-placed to draw in vital additional funding to Wales
- Quality - ensuring arrangements in the Bill allow Wales to continue to benefit from the international recognition of our quality assurance and enhancement system
- Ensuring the Commission is able to deliver on the objectives of the Bill by operating at arm's length
- Academic freedom and institutional autonomy – ensuring this is recognised and protected so that Wales is able to continue to operate competitively on the global stage, including through bringing world-leading researchers to live and work in Wales
- Widening access and social mobility – ensuring universities continue to be able to provide opportunities to students from all backgrounds

Universities in Wales are well-placed and eager to be collaborative partners in the nation's post-pandemic recovery and building Wales' future. Universities benefit the Welsh economy, through providing employment and through research and innovation activity in partnership with businesses. Universities also support wider society through civic mission projects benefiting local communities. Universities Wales is keen to support the Committee in their scrutiny of the TER Bill in order to ensure the vital role that universities play, and the opportunities they generate to partner with business and government to deliver tangible benefits to Wales, is upheld and understood.

### **UK context and post-18 reforms**

More broadly, the Committee may also wish to consider the dynamic environment that universities are currently having to navigate. The anticipated post-18 reforms in England, in addition to UK Government legislation such as the Internal Markets Act and the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, will all possibly impact post-16 education in Wales and require a policy response from the Welsh Government.



Given the potential impact of post-18 reforms in England, the Committee may wish to closely monitor developments across the border. Due to the large cross-border flow of students between England and Wales, changes in England could have significant impact on the Welsh higher education sector. Any response from Wales to changes in England should continue to allow for social mobility, to enable institutions to deliver for their communities and continue to support Wales in tackling the challenges we face as a nation. Universities Wales is very happy to support the Committee in their consideration of these multifarious issues.

### **Flexible learning**

Due to the adaptations to learning put in place as a response to Covid restrictions, educational institutions are more comfortable and equipped to deliver learning and teaching via digital means. There is an opportunity now to capitalise on this increased capability to consider how this can be utilised in expanding the delivery of adult education through flexible means. In a changing world, with an increased need for higher-level skills in the growing fields of automation and digitalisation, it is more important than ever that the population is given the opportunity to access higher education through upskilling alongside their work, or studying part-time.

The Committee may wish to work with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee (given the overlap between education and skills) to explore the future of flexible learning and its benefits to Wales, in light of the pandemic and future skills needs. Universities Wales would be happy to assist the Committee by providing evidence and case studies, and making recommendations for how we can expand the reach of higher education for people from all backgrounds.

### **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)**

#### **Mental Health**

Universities Wales provides the secretariat to the CPG on Universities. At meetings of the CPG during the fifth Senedd, members discussed student mental health and wellbeing, and stakeholders agreed to develop some policy recommendations for Welsh Government to consider, encapsulating mental health support for all students in post-16 education.



These recommendations will be shared with Welsh Government and the Committee in the next few months, and we would be grateful for the Committee's consideration of the proposals.

Areas of recommendation will include longer-term, ring-fenced funding, sector-wide initiatives such as GP passports and requiring effective information sharing between key partners, to ensure students don't 'fall through the gaps' in provision of care.

### **Learning Recovery**

More broadly, students starting university this year in particular have missed out on a significant period of schooling in-person, and may not have had the opportunity to attend university open days to prepare them for a significant life change. Although universities are well-placed to support students from all backgrounds and adapt teaching to take account for lost learning, there will be a significant deficit in learning that needs to be recovered. Universities Wales understands that learning recovery is a key priority for Welsh Government, and will wish to ensure additional support on offer is provided in a timely and efficient manner. Universities Wales would be happy to support the Committee in scrutinising the methods for supporting universities in learning recovery.

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

### **Civic Mission**

As well as the work universities do in widening access, teaching and learning and research that directly and indirectly benefit children and young people, our universities also engage in a range of civic mission activities many of which bring additional benefits to children and young people. These activities range from providing sporting facilities and opportunities to mentoring programmes in areas such as physics and modern languages.

A key area of civic mission work during the pandemic has been the launch of University Ready to support young people's transition to university.

University Ready is an online portal designed to offer advice and support to young people entering university life from school or college. It was created after a need was identified to give prospective university students help after a year when open days and university visits have not happened. With resources provided by all of Wales' universities, the platform gives a guide to what undergraduates can expect in their new academic and social environments as well as giving access to mental health



support, financial advice, study skills learning, and a host of other assets aimed at nurturing well-being at a difficult time for many.

More broadly, all Wales' universities are signed up to the Civic Mission Framework, which puts the Well-being of Future Generations Act at the centre of how higher education can contribute to civic life in Wales.

Universities Wales would be happy to facilitate opportunities for the Committee to hear more and engage with those involved in universities' civic mission projects.

