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Paul Davies
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Senedd Cymru
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from: Shavanah Taj
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16 June 2023

Dear Paul,

Evidence Concerning the Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund in relation to potential job losses at universities and in the third sector

Thank you for your letter asking for Wales TUC's evidence regarding the above. We are concerned about reports on potential job losses in these sectors for the human impact it will have on those workers affected and their families and communities. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry.

We have seen the evidence provided by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action and share their concerns about the impact on workers and, having consulted the unions who represent staff in this sector, have no further information to add.

With regard to the universities, we have been advised by the University and College Union (UCU Wales) that potential job losses in their sector is a matter of serious concern. UCU Wales represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, IT staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales. This is a joint response from UCU Wales and TUC Wales on this matter. UCU Wales would be happy to provide oral evidence to the committee on this matter.

As a point of departure, our principal observation is that these harms are occurring in the present. Notwithstanding the anxiety and uncertainty experienced by research staff, damage done to the wider Welsh research ecology presages atrophy in strategic disciplines and knowledge gathering areas – the bedrocks of the knowledge economy.

In a sector which is already plagued by pervasive precarious employment, job losses will further demoralize existing practitioners, and undermine confidence in the sector as the employer of choice for those with key skills. There is a very real prospect that graduates with key skills who lack the financial support to navigate an early career characterised by short-term contracts will be dissuaded from taking up research posts. Not only is

this likely to exacerbate underlying inequalities but also represents a net loss of talent to Welsh academia.

Acknowledging that at least some of the challenges are structural (such as funding mechanisms and the recent necessity of using revenue generated by international students to cross-subsidize research and teaching), we believe that the damage already occurring consequent to the end of structural funding requires an immediate and targeted intervention. After all, and in contrast to more insidious threats, it will not be possible to resuscitate research-streams when the teams, and their embedded expertise, are dispersed and networks have dissolved.

As an immediate measure, we propose an urgent 6-way meeting between the Universities, their governing bodies, UCU Cymru, HEFCW, Welsh and Westminster governments to establish urgent bridging funding for the scientists and related staff who will lose their jobs this year as a result of withdrawal of structural funds.

Scoping the Risk

- Best Estimated net loss = £50 to £70 million
- At least 60 projects and 1000 jobs at risk across Wales. Most of those affected are working on non-permanent contracts; many have been working this way for more than a decade, but loss of structural funds means that these work-streams will end.
- Given the historical purpose of structural funding, the impact will likely fall in strategic areas such as advanced manufacturing, energy systems, net zero, and health technology. Jeopardy to Wales is thus doubly perverse. Examples are below.
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is not a replacement. Putting aside obvious differences in quantum and bidding protocols, tasking local authorities with funding projects without ensuring the relevant research expertise or an appropriate formula is untenable. It is very unlikely that this spending will lead to research investment: research is not a priority for the 22 local authorities in Wales.
- UKRI and Horizon/Plan B are unlikely to mitigate in the short-term simply because they were not set up to do this work. They fund large projects, based on established research programmes.

Please read the appendix to this letter which provides examples of case studies and personal testimonies.

Short Term Solution: immediate rescue package for the knowledge economy

- £70 million is needed to bridge the funding gap, rescue research employment and ongoing projects, and retain talent for 18 months. Whilst medium and long-term solutions are developed, we must explore short-term, bridging measures: these might include a matched-funding package to stabilise employment, reduce the haemorrhaging of talent and underpin research and development.
- A 6-way meeting between the Universities, their governing bodies, UCU Cymru, HEFCW, Welsh and Westminster governments to establish urgent bridging funding for the scientists and related staff being made redundant this year as a result of withdrawal of structural funds.

- A task-and-finish group to explore how to put research activity on a permanent footing in university business plans. The Universities and Colleges Employers' Association have acknowledged the problem, but the knowledge economy needs a solution now, with proposals implemented this year.

Medium Term Solution

- A sector-wide rescue plan to compensate for loss of structural funding.
- Await report of task and finish group to establish:
 - o A permanent funding arrangement for research, and open-ended contracts for staff grade career researchers.
 - o Review of the impact of major UK research funders, including UK Research & Innovation and the National Institute for Health and Care Research.

Subsidiary Considerations – Medium-to-Long Term

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act places a strategic duty on the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to collaborate with trade unions. Evidence demonstrates that institutions which embrace collaboration and co-decision plan for the long term and perform as stable economic and civic actors. For this reason, we believe that any additional funding should be contingent upon a meaningful effort to develop social partnerships.

Welsh HEIs currently run an assortment of insecure contracts. If Wales wishes to grow and retain talent the use of such contracts should be minimised. In May 2022, UCU published a [report](#) which presented the findings of a survey into the experiences and needs of 955 postgraduate researchers in UK higher education (including Welsh institutions). Issues highlighted by respondents can be grouped into three categories:

1. Insufficient income and/or funding and the associated workload and time costs
2. Insufficient specificity in training and the formal requirements of the PhD for career development
3. Insufficient interpersonal support and integration of PGRs within universities.

Thank you taking the time to read our narrative. We hope that the analysis and human insight contained in the appendix below will convince readers that this work is too important to lose.

Yours sincerely

Shavanah Taj
General Secretary
Wales TUC

Jamie Insole
Policy Officer
UCU Wales

Appendix: Case studies and personal testimonies

Awen Institute likely to close in July 2023

- The Awen Institute brings together leading researchers, older people and the creative industries to co-produce products, services and environments for older people. The aim is to unlock one of the fastest growing but least understood market segments utilising the potential of creative industries.
- Central to the Awen Institute is refurbishment of existing facilities to build greater capacity for world-class research by creating a Hub as part of a Living Lab, which, along with citizen co-creation, will place older people at the centre of innovation, identifying needs and testing prototype products, experiences, environments or services. The Living Lab comprises innovation and collaboration spaces for academic-industry consortia; a daily living facility (a mock-up of a home living room, kitchen or dining room space) plus a virtual reality facility at the Singleton Park Campus, Swansea University.
- The Awen Institute's research activities and outputs could help future-proof the economy by enabling businesses and other economic players to equip themselves with the knowledge and insight they need to benefit fully from this increasingly-significant market opportunity.

The Computational Foundry as its WEFO funded period ends

- Despite the very challenging period, the Computational Foundry (CoFo), not only met, but exceeded targets, especially in terms of winning funding (£26M) and external engagement, including Wales industry, health, local government and grassroots communities (303 unique partners). Crucially the impact of the Foundry is far wider in Wales' economy and social fabric than the measurable impacts within the university.

Accelerate

- This has already lost/ is losing colleagues. AgorIP is a team of ~15 scientists, including secondees embedded in health boards across Wales, and is due to close. The team has been developing innovations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to address immediate and longer-term NHS needs. Investment has been ~£24m and ~£13m, respectively, but the headlines are the people and the activities. They have collectively supported scores of innovations by exploring hundreds of opportunities.
- Applications to develop healthcare innovations were explored, and connections made with relevant partners from the large networks developed through the project, including industrial companies, health care practitioners and academic researchers across Wales. For many projects, a short collaborative project with clear high impact outcomes was defined and undertaken by staff with individual expertise, utilising our 'state of the art' laboratory facilities which provided access to the highest standard of equipment. The development of new products and processes for scores of companies was documented each quarter. More details and case studies are available here: <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/medicine/enterprise-and-innovation/business-support-projects/accelerate-healthcare-technology-centre/>

Personal testimonies

- A colleague made redundant stated: "I could see so much being achieved each week; the number and diversity of projects supported means this work almost defies description."
- "My fixed term contract ended on 31/03/23 and I am currently employed on very short-term projects (until 31/07/23). The insecurity is incredibly stressful. I am looking for and applying for jobs, whilst also servicing a busy work schedule and trying to network and find sources of funding that could keep me employed."
- "I am still trying to keep the work 'live' (applying for small amounts of short-term funding) whilst at the same time, delivering all work to grant funders in short timescales. I am considering leaving academia. I am also considering selling my house, as I live alone, as a single wage earner and feel very stressed about pending unemployment and not being able to pay my mortgage and bills."