

Cross Party Group on Universities

Wednesday 6 December 2023 / 12.30pm - 1.30pm (Online)

Attendees

Hefin David MS – Chair of the CPG

Alex Still – Office of Hefin David MS

Niamh Salkeld – Education Adviser, Plaid Group Office

Professor Elizabeth Treasure – Chair of Universities Wales and Vice Chancellor of Aberystwyth University

Professor Maria Hinfelaar - Vice Chancellor Wrexham University

Professor Paul Boyle – Vice Chancellor Swansea University

Darren Xiberras – CFO, Cardiff University

Mairwen Harris - Head of Governance and Clerk to the Board, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Vivienne Stern MBE – Chief Executive of Universities UK

Jamie Insole – Policy Officer, UCU

Gareth Lloyd – Wales Official, UCU

David Blaney – Chief Executive, HEFCW

Orla Tarn – President, NUS Wales

Georgia Marks – Public Affairs Adviser, UCAS

Kevin McStravock - Lead Policy Officer (Nations & Europe), QAA

Amanda Wilkinson - Director, Universities Wales

Kieron Rees – Assistant Director, Universities Wales

Joshua Bell - Public Affairs Advisor, Universities Wales

Minutes

Hefin David MS (Chair) welcomed all guests to the meeting.

1. Universities Wales remarks – Professor Paul Boyle

Professor Paul Boyle (Swansea University) provided an update on the financial context of Welsh universities.

The financial pressures facing institutions in Wales were raised, and the impact of inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.

The importance of international students was noted, and the growing competition in this space amongst global institutions.

Professor Boyle underlined the fact that Welsh institutions are taking steps to address the financial challenges.

2. UUK perspective - Vivienne Stern MBE

Vivienne Stern MBE, CEO of Universities UK (UUK) was invited to share her remarks on the issue of financial sustainability.

The importance of receiving a clear statement from the Labour Party on the Graduate route was underlined – it was noted that UUK is working on this issue.

It was acknowledged that the issue of financial sustainability is impacting all four nations of the UK.

It was noted that UUK has recently commissioned a piece of analysis on the financial forecasts of institutions across the UK nations by PwC.

It was noted that, from a UK perspective, that international students number growth projections may be optimistic, and this will continue to be a crucial issue in 2024.

The importance of university for young people was underlined, although it was noted that domestic student numbers may be impacted in 2024, resulting in a softening in enrolment.

It was noted that the cost increases institutions are likely to face in 2024 will be a significant challenge.

3. Open discussion – led by Hefin David MS

Mike Hedges MS highlighted the huge advantage and impact of universities, and the role institutions can play in driving forward local and rural economies.

Gareth Lloyd (UCU) stressed the importance of encouraging students to return Wales after studying in other home nations.

Jamie Insole (UCU) highlighted the role of social partnerships in Wales, and the opportunity to work together under CTER in 2024.

Amanda Wilkinson (Universities Wales) stressed the need to focus on the high-level skills gaps in Wales, and the potential challenge facing sectors such as health, should urgent action not be taken.

Professor Elizabeth Treasure (Aberystwyth University) highlighted that the issues discussed are across the economy and education portfolios.

David Blaney (HEFCW) underlined the huge pressures on Welsh universities – and reassured guests that excellent leaders are best placed to make the adequate changes. It was noted that Welsh Government needs to ensure decisions are being made for the long-term, as well as short-term.

Georgia Marks (UCAS) highlighted UCAS' work in the area of international students and committed to keep the CPG updated.

Professor Maria Hinfelaar (Wrexham University) underlined the importance of the higher education sector identifying the talent to fill the gaps in the economy.

4. Meeting close

The next meeting will be held in Spring 2024, the topic will be CTER.

5. Agreed Actions

An action was agreed to shape an article in early 2024, specifically relating to the issue of financial sustainability.