

Routes into post 16 Education and Training

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Chair, Children Young People and Education Committee

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Dear Chair

Firstly, may I express my thanks to the Committee for inviting Universities Wales to provide oral evidence earlier this month, which we hope will provide useful information to the Committee in preparing its report and recommendations, along with our written evidence.

I would like to provide an update to the Committee in light of the latest UCAS data now available, demonstrating the application rate for university entry for next academic year based on applications made by the 29 January Equal Consideration deadline:

- Wales has the lowest proportion of 18-year-olds applying for university in the UK: just 32% of Welsh 18-year-olds have applied to university compared to 33.2% at this point last year. This is particularly concerning when compared to the UK as a whole, where the figure stands at 40.6%.
- The figures show a widening application gap between the least and most advantaged students in Wales. The proportion of 18-year-olds applying from WIMD Q1 has decreased to 20.1%, while those from Q5 has increased by 0.3%.
- Disadvantaged students in Wales are also less likely to apply to university, compared to other parts of the UK. In England, 31% of 18-year-olds in Q1 (the most disadvantaged) apply for university, compared to just 20.1% in Wales.
- Applications via UCAS from mature students in Wales have also continued to decline, particularly in the 25-34 age group. Wales now has the fewest numbers of mature students applying to university than at any point in the past decade.

This latest data release underlines the issues Universities Wales raised in our written and oral evidence, that generational inequality is being baked-in.

We are particularly concerned about the gap in applications between WIMD quintiles 1 and 5, and the fact that over time this gap has *widened*, while the gap has *narrowed* in England. The social mobility and life-changing opportunities offered by tertiary education are not being grasped by those with the most to gain – and this must be addressed for Wales to be a progressive and prosperous nation where all can reach their potential and thrive.

Further to the above, as requested, I will also address the questions shared by the Committee clerk that were not covered during the oral evidence session:

- Your paper refers to the importance of data to understand trends of learners' destinations. To what extent does a lack of published data limit decisions post-16 education and training providers are able to make regarding provision?

At present, there is not one set of data or analysis that presents a complete picture of participation across the tertiary education sector as a whole. While it is possible to piece together separate data sets to some extent, caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions or shaping policy interventions on the basis of incoherent data. For policy makers to draw conclusions and understand trends, one dataset would provide the granularity and certainty needed for any interventions to be well-founded.

- In your view, who should be taking forward work on improving data in this area? Should it be Careers Wales, the Welsh Government or Medr for example?

Universities Wales welcomes Medr's commitments within its draft strategic plan, and its written and oral evidence, to taking forward work on ensuring there is a robust dataset from which to better analyse the full picture of post-16 education and training destinations.

I would like to thank the Committee for conducting this important inquiry, and look forward to continuing to work with you in calling for much-needed interventions to boost Wales' post-16 education and training participation rates, to pave the way for the future our country needs.

Your sincerely



Amanda Wilkinson

Director, Universities Wales