

Cross Party Group on Universities

Wednesday 23 November 2022

12.30pm - 1.30pm (Online)

Attendees

Hefin David MS - Chair of the CPG on Universities

Sioned Williams MS – Senedd Member for South Wales West

Professor Paul Boyle - Vice-Chancellor, Swansea University

Professor Edmund Burke - Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University

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

Professor Damian Walford Davies - Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University

Professor Cara Carmichael Aitchison - Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cerith Rhys Jones - External Affairs Manager, the Open University in Wales

Orla Tarn - NUS Wales President

Alastair Delaney - Director of Operations & Deputy Chief Executive, QAA

Harriet Barnes - Director of Policy and Funding, HEFCW

Hannah Peeler - Policy Officer, British Heart Foundation

Alex Still - Senior Adviser to Hefin David MS

Berwyn Davies - Welsh Higher Education Brussels

Catherine Marston - Welsh Higher Education Brussels

Amanda Wilkinson - Director, Universities Wales

Lewis Dean - Head of Wales Innovation Network, Universities Wales

Kieron Rees - Assistant Director, Universities Wales

Sophie Douglas - Policy Adviser, Universities Wales

Joshua Bell - Public Affairs Adviser, Universities Wales

Minutes

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

AGM

Sioned Williams MS nominated Hefin David MS as Chair of the Cross Party Group.

Hefin David MS nominated Joshua Bell as Secretary of the Cross Party Group.

Hefin David MS thanked Sophie Douglas for her work as Secretary.

Joshua Bell will send out annual report and financial statement over the next 6 weeks.

1. Cost of living crisis

Orla Tarn provided an overview of the cost-of-living student survey carried out by NUS.

Cerith Rhys Jones highlighted the difficulties faced by part-time / mature students differs to those experienced by traditional 18-year-old students, and quality of learning could be affected if they are not supported.

Prof Treasure and Cerith Rhys Jones noted a rise in hardship fund applications at their respective institutions.

Harriet Barnes notified the group that HEFCW has been asked by the Education Minister to find out from institutions how they are supporting students with the cost of living.

2. Relationship with Europe

Prof Treasure updated CPG members on the recent visits to Brussels, and noted that uncertainty over Horizon association remains a barrier, and it looks likely that we are moving to Plan B.

Amanda Wilkinson noted that universities in Wales have made a conscious decision to retain engagement with Europe despite Horizon uncertainty.

Hefin David MS raised the issue of post-study work visas and asked if plans to restrict these is still on the Home Office's agenda.

Prof Treasure and Prof Walford Davies noted that visa situation has improved but required caution.

3. UK Higher Education Infrastructure

Prof Treasure noted that divergence in UK HE infrastructure is causing issues for Welsh universities.

Alastair Delaney outlined the situation regarding quality assurance.

Amanda Wilkinson advised that there is an outstanding need for bridging funding and the sector is having conversation about how and where this might be secured.

Hefin David MS noted his work on transition to employment with the Education Minister, which has some overlap with higher education in terms of degree apprenticeships etc. Hefin will share with the CPG once it is ready.

4. Meeting close

The next meeting will be held in Feb/Mar 2023. Universities Wales is looking at the potential of a joint event with Colegau Cymru, and the CPG on Further Education.

5. Agreed Actions

- An action was agreed to consider writing a letter to Stephen Kinnock MP raising these concerns about post-EU funding.
- An action was agreed to write to the Education Minister and Housing Minister outlining the issues.
- An action was agreed to keep a watching brief on the Home Office in relation to potential restrictions on post-study work visas.