

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Llwybrau at addysg a hyfforddiant ôl-16](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 30

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd

Response from: Cardiff Metropolitan University

Overview

- i. Fostering a system that supports seamless transitions from compulsory education to further learning or employment is paramount, but the levels of post-16 participation are a challenge. For the Welsh economy, the Chief Economist has long spoken of the need to improve skill levels.¹ The Institute for Fiscal Studies highlights the most disadvantaged pupils have low skill levels, which can perpetuate inequalities.² The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reports that, in 2022, over a third of job vacancies in Wales were difficult to fill due to applicant quality and skills shortages.³
- ii. In terms of higher education specifically, graduates still acquire significant benefits.⁴ Furthermore, Universities UK projects 95% of new jobs in Wales will require graduate-level qualifications by 2035, necessitating over 400,000 extra graduates to address impending skills gaps.⁵ There also specific forms of post-16 provision that are essential for public service sustainability.
- iii. For example, Wales needs a substantial increase in teachers.⁶ Shortages experienced in certain subjects (e.g. physics) create a double-need for suitable numbers to move into higher education; once for their initial subject degree and then again for a postgraduate certificate in education.⁷ It is a similar picture with healthcare roles, which will also need a large increase in university participation to prevent future shortfalls.⁸
- vi. Addressing the issue means a multi-faceted approach:
 - Recognition of prior learning to allow for more seamless progression.

¹ Welsh Government. 2024. [Wales Economic and Fiscal Report 2024](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

² Sibieta, L. 2024. [Major challenges for education in Wales](#). London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

³ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. 2023. [Devolution and evolution in UK skills policy: Finding common ground across the four nations](#). London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

⁴ Universities UK. 2024. [The value of going to university](#). London: Universities UK.

⁵ Universities UK. 2023. [Jobs of the future](#). London: Universities UK.

⁶ Hughes, S. 2023. [Teaching matters](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.

⁷ Hutchinson, J. 2024. [Incentives to recruit and retain teachers in Wales](#). London: Education Policy Institute.

⁸ Welsh Government. 2023. [National Workforce Implementation Plan: Addressing NHS Wales Workforce Challenges](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

- A domestic ‘Study in Wales’ brand that targets areas of low participation and the home-based commuter student and operates on a ‘provider agnostic’ basis.
 - Further research on the impact of travel infrastructure on post-16 participation.
 - Consideration of reforming the funding model for degree apprenticeships to allow for supply to meet demand.
 - Increased resource for Careers Wales.
- v. This will require investment from universities and some support from public funds to ensure a coherent and collaborative approach. It would also be advisable for the committee to utilise the work of ADR Wales to better understand the issues.
- vi. Lastly, it is essential to break from discussion of opposed ‘vocational’ and ‘academic’ routes. What matters are skills and knowledge, which exist in all forms of education.

1. Quality of information given to learners and careers support at compulsory school age.

- 1.1 The analysis of ADR Wales has been of particular interest and has emphasised the centrality of careers guidance in driving post-16 participation.^{9 10} Its papers suggest that interactions with Careers Wales can enable better choices for learners.^{11 12} The integral role of careers guidance is reinforced by UCAS in evidence submitted to the committee for a separate inquiry and was a consistent theme in *Transitions to Employment*.^{13 14}
- 1.2 Given the above, the University’s experience of careers guidance in recent years is a cause for concern. The cuts and restructuring at Careers Wales have led to confusion about appropriate contacts for guidance, affecting the support available to students. This has meant disparities in support across schools, resulting in reduced assistance for some learners and potentially impacting their educational outcomes.
- 1.3 The increased demand for external careers sessions indicates gaps in support from Careers Wales, suggesting a need for improved internal resources. Those students must often independently research options, reducing engagement with wider opportunities and potentially affecting their educational trajectories. To be clear, it is not the quality of the staff at Careers Wales but their reduction in number.
- 1.4 More broadly, it is essential that learners know that universities value all level 3 qualifications, which is something we have seen might not necessarily be getting

⁹ Davies, R., Huxley, K. and Yunus, S. 2021. [*Understanding the origins of labour market disadvantage in Wales*](#). Cardiff: ADR Wales.

¹⁰ Huxley, K. and Davies, R. 2023. [*Effectiveness of careers guidance in supporting participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training \(PCET\)*](#). Cardiff: ADR Wales.

¹¹ Huxley, K., Davies, R. and Yunus, S. 2019. [*Careers Guidance and Transitions to Further Education in Wales*](#). *International Journal of Population Data Science* 4(3).

¹² Davies, R., Yunus, S. and Huxley, K. 2019. [*Careers guidance provisions and progression to post-16 education: An empirical analysis for Wales*](#). *International Journal of Population Data Science* 4(3).

¹³ UCAS. 2023. [*UCAS response: Inquiry into the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Act*](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.

¹⁴ David, H. 2023. [*Transitions to Employment: A Report for the Welsh Government*](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

through to post-16 learners in either further education or school settings. Increasing higher education participation will not be a means of simply increasing A level uptake.

- 1.5 While increased Careers Wales resource will mean some public funding, the University will need to do more as an institution (see section 2).

2. Changes in routes post-18

- 2.1 Universities Wales says that the “gap between the [higher education participation] rate in Wales and the rest of the UK has been increasing over time, and is now at its widest point in 15 years”.¹⁵ The Sutton Trust has shown similar problems in Welsh participation, while the Education Policy Institute points to “worse post-16 educational outcomes”.^{16 17}
- 2.2 This has significant implications for the economy and public service provision. A sustained decline in Welsh participation will mean more reliance on recruitment from the rest of the UK and overseas if Wales is to have the workforce it needs (especially in health and education). This comes with attendant risks, as seen most recently with the tightening of immigration policy. It is also imperative that the sector is on a sound financial footing if there are to be high-quality opportunities within Wales.
- 2.3 In terms of Welsh recruitment, the loss of some sixth forms has resulted in limited university exposure in certain local authorities. The shrinking of options in those places has meant early ‘funnelling’ of students, meaning reduced exposure to universities. Some colleges have established fixed partnerships with specific universities, which then limit learner’s options. The absence of centralised contacts and specialised knowledge on higher education in some further education institutions complicates collaboration.
- 2.4 To note, UCAS data show participation rates vary considerably across Wales.¹⁸ Aside from economic disadvantage (see section 4), connectivity is a significant barrier. Navigating public transport is challenging, with infrequent and inaccessible services connecting campuses and city centres. Inadequate travel connections further isolate potential learners, limiting access to educational opportunities. Learner travel for post-16 education is a known issue, and it can reinforce existing inequalities.^{19 20}
- 2.5 North-south connections are notably poor, which makes it difficult to retain some students in Wales. The average train journey from Bangor to Cardiff takes over 4.5 hours, limiting accessibility between regions. Studying in England is more attractive when travel times are better. Indeed, a significant number of students prefer to move away from home, citing better amenities and broader experiences in other regions.

¹⁵ Universities Wales. 2024. [Explainer: Welsh participation in higher education](#). Cardiff: Universities Wales.

¹⁶ Montacute, R. and Cullinane, C. 2023. [25 Years of University Access: How access to higher education has changed over time](#). London: Sutton Trust.

¹⁷ Sibieta, L. 2024. [Major challenges for education in Wales](#). London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

¹⁸ UCAS. 2023. [Wales regional analysis: A deep dive into higher education progression across the Welsh parliamentary regions](#). Cheltenham: UCAS.

¹⁹ Welsh Government. 2022. [Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure \(2008\) review 2021](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

²⁰ Bucelli, I. and McKnight, A. 2022. [Poverty and social exclusion: review of international evidence on transport disadvantage](#). Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

- 2.6 In the most recent Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, over 31% of Welsh undergraduates were studying in England.²¹ Significant numbers were studying at institutions in cities and towns of the northwest and southwest of England.²² This would accelerate if certain subjects were to 'disappear' from Welsh providers.
- 2.7 Degree apprenticeships are heavily promoted, as they bridge the work-based element of an apprenticeship and the academic framework of a higher education qualification. The University offers degree apprenticeships in data science, cyber security and software engineering. The funding for degree apprenticeship courses was administered by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), with Medr inheriting it.
- 2.8 HEFCW allocated a share of c. £10m to each institution to deliver their degree apprenticeships. The funding pot falls well short of requirements, meaning:
- Applicants have been turned away, albeit preferring to defer rather than transfer.
 - Partner organisations have had their workforce planning disrupted.
 - Adding new pathways, e.g. rail, has stretched the budget too far.
 - Institutions that took early 'market share' have had it 'baked-in', limiting growth at other providers and creating regional imbalance.
- 2.9 Furthermore, the increase in the maximum fee to £9,250 did not apply to degree apprenticeships; the regulations only apply to courses covered by tuition fees. This situation is repeating, with the £9,535 fee not applying to degree apprenticeships. The viability of these courses is being hindered and at a time when Careers Wales argues of "a strong need to expand the current Degree Apprenticeships offer to include other areas of need in the region such as Health and Social Care, Construction, Low Carbon/ Green Energy and Leadership and Management".²³
- 2.10 There is a need for a combined, provider-agnostic, domestic Study in Wales brand that is highly attentive to the multiple reasons for low participation. Physically situated as an office, it would have a programme of free outreach and enrichment activity, in every college and in as many sixth forms as possible. In the messaging for any such brand, universities need to think of ways of rebalancing towards the home-based commuter student, rather than selling the 'boarding school' experience that is increasingly out of reach and alien to lower socio-economic demographics.
- 2.11 The University supports the Welsh Government's stated priority of Medr exploring "the opportunities for and barriers to achieving credit transfer across the tertiary system and consider how they may be addressed including how to incorporate the recognition of prior learning to facilitate the movement of learners throughout the tertiary sector".²⁴ The recognition of prior learning will be an essential part of the future landscape.

²¹ HESA. 2024. [Where do HE students come from?](#). Cheltenham: HESA.

²² HESA. 2024. [Where do HE students study?](#). Cheltenham: HESA.

²³ Careers Wales. 2025. [Consultation on Apprenticeship pathways Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs committee](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.

²⁴ Welsh Government. 2024. [Statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

2.12 Beyond graduation, we would note the Sutton Trust report of January 2025 that showed Wales has the lowest level of internship uptake (35% of graduates).²⁵ A high proportion of those internships were also unpaid or underpaid.

3. Welsh-medium

3.1 The University continues to invest in its Welsh-medium provision, ensuring the options continue to grow. Healthcare and initial teacher education have been a particular focus, with Wales desperately needing graduates to fill these public service roles and to do so with the requisite language skills. For example, a 'Welsh for Educators' programme has been created to address the shortage of Welsh-medium teachers.²⁶

3.2 In terms of progression into higher education, colleges do not maintain comprehensive records of learners in Welsh-medium education, which makes targeted outreach difficult. The Welsh Language Commissioner has highlighted this difference between school and college learners in terms of their perception of their ability in Welsh, indicating a need for better tracking and support.²⁷

3.3 In line with the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol issued its first official advice to Medr on Welsh language duties.²⁸ Medr has welcomed and accepted the request to draw up a national plan for the Welsh language.²⁹ The University welcomes the committee's scrutiny of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill and its request for clarity on provisions affecting Medr.³⁰ The University also welcomes Welsh Government accepting the recommendations; it is essential that universities are not pulled in different directions.³¹

3.4 Before its replacement, HEFCW recognised the additional costs of Welsh-medium provision and provided premia for each student. An independent evaluation for HEFCW found that the premia needed to increase.³² However, its budget was insufficient to meet the challenge, with HEFCW only able to enhance the premia for Welsh-medium provision in subjects already determined as 'high cost' or 'expensive'.³³ That means, for example, premia are not available for Welsh undergraduates studying law or politics.

²⁵ Holt-White, E. and Cullinane, C. 2025. [*Unpaid and underpaid internships: Access to internships for graduates*](#). London: Sutton Trust.

²⁶ Cardiff Metropolitan University. 2023. [*Free Welsh lessons at Cardiff Met aims to boost Welsh-medium teacher workforce*](#). Cardiff: Cardiff Metropolitan University.

²⁷ Welsh Language Commissioner. 2023. [*Post-compulsory education and the Welsh language: the learners' voice*](#). Caernarfon: Welsh Language Commissioner.

²⁸ Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. 2024. [*Advice under the Designation The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's initial advice to Medr*](#). Carmarthen: Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

²⁹ Medr. 2024. [*Medr responds to first advice on its duties relating to the Welsh language*](#). Cardiff: Medr.

³⁰ Welsh Parliament Children, Young People and Education Committee. 2024. [*Welsh Language and Education \(Wales\) Bill: Stage 1 Report*](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.

³¹ Drakeford, M. 2025. [*Letter to Buffy Williams*](#), 13 January.

³² London Economics. 2023. [*Costs of Welsh medium provision at higher education institutions in Wales*](#). London: London Economics.

³³ HEFCW. 2023. [*Outcomes of the review on the additional costs of Welsh Medium Study at Higher Education Institutions in Wales*](#). Bedwas: HEFCW.

4. Equity of access

- 4.1 Learners have often decided not to go to university at an early age, well before GCSE level and post-16. This is common to all UK nations, but the Education Policy Institute notes that the trends in Wales are “a source of major concern” and that Wales has notably underperformed compared to the rest of the UK and the English regions.³⁴
- 4.2 The Education Policy Institute notes that young people in Wales have the lowest participation in higher education across the UK, with Welsh boys seeing particularly poor trends over the last 15 years.³⁵ Again, the work of ADR Wales is important. It has found students are more likely to have a guidance interview if they are from a disadvantaged background or are a low attainer, and that having a guidance interview decreases their likelihood of not entering education or training.^{36 37 38}
- 4.3 The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) issued a report on the barriers at the end of 2024, finding household deprivation and socio-economic background are significant factors.³⁹ It also said data showed “learners who were female, non-FSM, with no known SEN, no disability status, of non-UK status, and of non-Christian religion had a higher proportion of entry to HE”.⁴⁰ It also found early bifurcation of routes. Analysis for UK Government accords with many of the findings in Wales.⁴¹
- 4.4 Wales’ funding model is the outcome of Sir Ian Diamond’s review of higher education and student funding. Independent analysis shows that the student finance package is the most progressive in the UK, both in terms of its maintenance support and repayment model.⁴² There should be caution in determining whether the funding package is failing in terms of access, with the problems running longer than its existence and a need to avoid drawing causation from correlation. As was stated in the Diamond review, “widening access and participation in higher education are not just about getting students into institutions, but about supporting them to stay and to achieve”.⁴³

³⁴ Robson, J. et al. 2024. [Comparing policies, participation and inequalities across UK post-16 Education and Training landscapes](#). London: Education Policy Institute.

³⁵ Robson, J. et al. 2024. [Comparing policies, participation and inequalities across UK post-16 Education and Training landscapes](#). London: Education Policy Institute.

³⁶ Huxley, K. and Davies, R. 2023. [How is careers guidance for school pupils prioritised?](#). Cardiff: ADR Wales.

³⁷ Davies, R. 2020. [Addressing inequality? The provision of careers guidance in Welsh schools](#). Cardiff: ADR Wales.

³⁸ Huxley, K. and Davies, R. 2023. [Effectiveness of careers guidance in supporting participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training \(PCET\)](#). Cardiff: ADR Wales.

³⁹ Nesom, S. et al. 2024. [Widening participation in tertiary education: Evidence review and reflections for Wales](#). Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

⁴⁰ Huxley, K. and Davies, R. 2024. [Understanding inequity in tertiary education in Wales: Analysis of linked data](#). Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

⁴¹ Archer, R. et al. 2021. [The road not taken: the drivers of course selection: The determinants and consequences of post-16 education choices](#). London: UK Government.

⁴² London Economics. 2024. [General Election Briefings: Examination of higher education fees and funding across the UK – February 2024](#). London: London Economics.

⁴³ Welsh Government. 2016. [The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales: Final Report](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

- 4.5 Indeed, the Sutton Trust's analysis of efforts to widen access to higher education in the UK for the last 25 years is that such efforts have been "running to stand still" i.e. while trends seem not to have widened access, they might well have at least prevented a narrowing.⁴⁴ Welsh Government's has included appropriate work packages in its proposed evaluation of the Diamond reforms, with robust evidence needed to draw conclusions about the relationship between the funding model and participation.⁴⁵
- 4.6 WCPP has assessed existing policy interventions. It felt foundation years were likely to be effective, but recent policy changes are affecting their provision. At its Autumn Budget, UK Government capped the maximum loan to English students at £5,760 for foundation years in 'classroom-based' subjects.
- 4.7 While this change does not apply in Wales, there is substantial cross-border recruitment and institutions in Wales will need to cut the fee for those courses. This means more financial pressures at an already difficult time; UK Government's assessment shows it is aware of the negative financial impact this will have on universities, believing it will take £154m to £239m out of the sector in England alone.⁴⁶

5. Post-16 destination data

- 5.1 Tracking learners is difficult and the need for improved data is a consistent request. The absence of accessible data on post-16 destinations makes it difficult to analyse student choices and institutional offerings, hindering informed decision-making. Wales is losing students at each education transition point and losing even more data at each juncture. ADR Wales has noted the present difficulties.⁴⁷
- 5.2 UCAS and the HESA are well-established sources for university data. However, there are substantial difficulties with Data Futures, which is a UK sector-wide transformation programme to improve data collection. Despite its aim, Data Futures has hampered this activity in the most recent academic years. On behalf of all four nations' regulators, the Office for Students in England has appointed Price Waterhouse Coopers to lead an independent review.⁴⁸ The success or failure of the project will be significant for the ability to analyse trends in Wales in future.

6. Welsh Government's role

- 6.1 The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 put in place relevant legal duties for Medr, including the promotion of lifelong learning, participation in tertiary

⁴⁴ Montacute, R. and Cullinane, C. 2023. [25 Years of University Access: How access to higher education has changed over time](#). London: Sutton Trust.

⁴⁵ Welsh Government. 2024. [Diamond Reforms to student finance: evaluation plan 2024](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

⁴⁶ UK Government. 2025. [Impact Assessment 2025 No.13: Lowering maximum tuition fee and loan limits for HE foundation years in classroom-based subjects](#). London: UK Government.

⁴⁷ Huxley, K. and Davies, R. 2023. [Exploring transitions to post-compulsory education in Wales](#). Cardiff: ADR Wales.

⁴⁸ Office for Students. 2024. [Data Futures independent review](#). London: Office for Students.

education and equality of opportunity.⁴⁹ Similarly, it ensured institutions will face a mandatory condition pertaining to equal opportunity if they are to register with the regulator.

- 6.2 Furthermore, participation was included in the list of strategic priorities that Welsh Government has issued to Medr (as per the Act).⁵⁰ Accordingly, participation is a key thread in the draft strategic plan that Medr has developed in response to both the Act and the ministerial priorities.⁵¹ Welsh Government and Medr have committed to appropriate actions in the coming years, in particular the recognition of prior learning.
- 6.3 As above, Wales needs a domestic ‘Study in Wales’ brand that is highly attentive to the multiple reasons for low participation. Ideally, this is physically situated as an office with a programme of free outreach and enrichment activity, agnostic of provider, in all colleges and as many sixth forms as possible.
- 6.4 The messaging for a domestic study in Wales brand would need to think of ways of rebalancing towards the home-based commuter student, rather than selling the ‘boarding school’ experience that is increasingly out-of-reach and alien to lower socioeconomic demographics.
- 6.5 Public finances are tight, and any additional resource needs careful consideration. The University would advocate the sector leading on a domestic study brand, with some government support where possible. It would advocate Careers Wales having increased resource from Welsh Government.
- 6.6 Other policies need stronger evidence. Accordingly, the University recommends that Welsh Government further explores the impact of travel infrastructure on post-16 participation and the funding model for degree apprenticeships.

⁴⁹ [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Act 2022](#). asc. 1.

⁵⁰ Welsh Government. 2024. [Statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

⁵¹ Medr. 2024. [Strategic Plan](#). Cardiff: Medr.