

Note of meeting between the Minister for further and higher education and post 16 teaching union representatives

Monday 9th December 2024 – 12.30pm

Present

Vikki Howells MS (Minister for Further and Higher Education)

Gareth Lloyd - UCU

Lynn Hackett - Unison

Michaela Gilroy - Unite

Zenny Saunders (DD learner Experience Division)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Note

Apologies noted from Lynne Neagle MS and GMB representative

The Minister welcomed trade union side colleagues to the meeting. Explained that the shared purpose of these meetings is to ensure that communication channels with trade union colleagues are open and transparent.

The Minister discussed the £20m announced for FE and HE on 4 December and that the further rise to the tuition fee cap would further support universities financially at this time.

[REDACTED] with endorsement of the other union representatives, agreed that while there has been some positive movement (and welcomed the additional investment) he needed to express joint trade unions' concern with the current financial position in which HEIs in Wales find themselves. Almost all universities are at, or have, made voluntary redundancies and the picture in Cardiff, Aberystwyth, USW and Swansea is particularly critical. [REDACTED] also mentioned the position with the potential relocation of UG courses from Lampeter to Carmarthen and the associated potential consequences to staff, learners and the local community.

[REDACTED] also reiterated previous discussions around the value of research and professional learning across schools (primary and secondary) and FE/HE to share learning, and the need for a truly joined up approach to support research and professional learning (Seren aside). The Minister noted that the points had been made previously and that decisions were needed on how that might be achieved. ZS mentioned that

discussions/decisions would need to be made within schools side also to facilitate this [REDACTED] alongside links with Seren and with learning pathways (within TED) in respect of policy support for pathways and transition.

Action: Internal discussions at official level to take place and a meeting to be facilitated between unions, school side and TED colleagues in the new year. (Action TED to lead).

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Clear need for major (financial) intervention in the HE sectors. Minister clear that as autonomous institutions HEIs are responsible for decisions/planning in respect of workforce and location and the need/decisions to restructure so that provision and institutions are sustainable in the longer term. Minister was also pleased to see the social partnership working in action and urged unions to respond to HEIs' consultations. The Minister also noted that 10% of HEI funding came from Welsh Government the remainder from HEI own arrangements and from tuition fees.

Both Minister and trade unions recognised the implications of Westminster decisions on the visa situation for overseas students. Trade unions were also positive on welcoming the 5.5% public sector pay uplift for FE and sixth forms, but the pay position in HE (UK wide negotiations and deferment of pay) was an issue the unions could not ignore.

The Minister recognised that unions had good relationships with Medr and that the additional funding available would be for Medr to allocate, and unions in those discussions could ask about the detail in how funding is allocated.

Budgets, the budget announcement due 10 December was briefly discussed along with additional pressure on providers of the employer NI contribution. Recognised Westminster issue. The Minister referred to the additional revenue that the increased tuition fee would bring offset costs. Budget decisions were for the CSfE and CSfF.

[REDACTED]
mentioned that the scale of numbers yet to be known as consultation underway. Have good social partnership arrangements with HEIs, but this may change.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Position on Lampeter campus briefly discussed – very few UG courses, and decisions yet to be made about the future of the campus.

The Minister closed by thanking the unions for their honest and open discussions and welcomed continued ongoing and future discussions with unions and workforce.

GD 11 December 24.

