

Minister Further and Higher Education Meeting with Chairs of ChUW – 10 December 2024

Attendees

Minister for Further and Higher Education

Marian Wyn Jones (MWJ), Chair of Council and Chair of ChUW, Bangor University

Meri Huws (MH), Chair of Council, Aberystwyth University

Patrick Younge (PY), Chair of Council, Cardiff University

John Taylor (JT) CBE, Chair of the Board of Governors, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Goi Ashmore (GA), Chair of Council, Swansea University

Louise Evans (LE), Chair of the Board of Governors, University of South Wales

Emlyn Dole (ED), Chair of Council, University of Wales Trinity St Davids

Dr Leigh Griffin (LG), Chair of the Board of Governors, Wrexham University

Ruth Meadows (RM), Director of Tertiary Education Directorate, Welsh Government

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Welcome and introductions

1. The Minister welcomed colleagues to the meeting and invited individual introductions. The Minister highlighted the benefits of having regular such meetings with Chairs.

Sector Overview

2. ██████ presented an overview of key themes impacting the sector, including increased costs, decreasing student participation rates and a reduction in international student intake. These pressures are causing universities to consider cost reductions, including voluntary severance schemes. The importance of collaboration, and working together was emphasised, along with setting short, medium and long-term goals for improving sector sustainability. In addition, there is a need to consider what more can be done to make university appealing to disadvantaged groups and widen access.
3. The Minister reaffirmed the Welsh Government's commitments to supporting and engaging the sector as appropriate and where possible. It is encouraging that institutions are considering more ways to collaborate. The Minister is relatively new to post and advised that it has been extremely helpful to visit many institutions across the country, to hear first-hand the issues being experienced. The Minister will be visiting institutions in North Wales shortly.
4. The Minister expressed her firm desire for everything possible to be done by institutions to avoid compulsory redundancies, and all processes and engagement to be undertaken in accordance with the principles and in the spirit of social partnership. Institutions confirmed that whilst they couldn't guarantee not making compulsory redundancies, all reasonable steps will be taken to avoid the possibility.

Funding

5. There was discussion about universities meeting the criteria for access to Shared Prosperity Fund. Further investigations are needed by institutions to determine if and how funding could be accessed.
6. Institutions questioned the feasibility of more opportunities to access research funding pots across the UK. More work needs to be done by institutions to map the funding available and the potential for accessing additional monies. This could be explored with the Wales Innovation Network and Medr.

Action: WG to explore options for accessing more research related funding schemes with the Wales Innovation Network and Medr.

7. Institutions welcomed the loan funding for decarbonisation initiatives and queried if funding was available for the next financial year.

Action: WG to clarify decarbonisation scheme funding proposals for 2025 – 26.

8. There was discussion about the potential for institutions to look across government for funding options rather than just the education department. Also, institutions emphasised the importance for competition law to be clarified, so that there was an understanding of what could and could not be done in terms of working together.

Action: WG to raise the issue with Medr.

9. Further conversation focused on Seren, and options for making more use of the programme to showcase the benefits of a university education, including any links to Global Wales.
10. Colleagues agreed to meet every six months.

Action: WG to arrange biannual meetings.