

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i egwyddorion cyffredinol y \[Bil Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil \\(Cymru\\)\]\(#\)](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into the general principles of the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill](#)**

**TER 08**

**Ymateb gan: UNISON Cymru**

**Response from: UNISON Wales**

1. UNISON is broadly supportive of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill.
2. UNISON would like to seek further clarity on the governance arrangements and the level of control Welsh Government will have over the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.
3. Furthermore, UNISON does not believe there will be an adequate representation of the worker voice on the Board. The Bill refers to at least two associate members to represent the wider tertiary education workforce, where at least one is academic and at least one is non-academic. This is not sufficient given the commission will have oversight of higher education, further education, and sixth form education and the vastly distinct roles contained within each element. The experiences of support staff in sixth form schools are going to be very different to the experiences or support staff in further education, and very different again to those support staff in higher education. Furthermore, there is a wide range of business support roles and we do not have confidence all these roles can be understood and represented fairly under the arrangements proposed. The worker voice cannot be underestimated or undervalued within the new commission.
4. There is already a gap in the terms and conditions between academic and non-academic staff, and this runs throughout the whole education system. At school level most school support staff are employed on term-time only contracts. At Further and Higher Education level, the support and business roles are always first to face cuts or to be outsourced on inferior terms and conditions of employment. Without the adequate worker voice from across

the whole education workforce on the Commission, this two-tier culture will become further entrenched.

5. It is important to consider this in the wider context of fair work and social partnership, and within the legislative framework of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill. The higher education sector in Wales has had an ad hoc approach to participation and engagement in the social partnership mechanisms. UNISON has consistently raised concerns about this, and we have concerns about how this will translate in a new Commission that is bringing together the whole post-16 education sector.
6. UNISON believes it is important to make specific reference to social partnership as a part of this Bill, rather than rely solely on the separate Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill. The reason is twofold. Firstly, whilst Welsh Government has the clear intention to bring the Social Partnership and Procurement Bill into legislation, there are no guarantees this ambition will be realised. Secondly, by including social partnership in the Tertiary Education and Research Bill, it reinforces the fact that social partnership applies across the tertiary education sector.
7. There is a need to ensure equity across the sector for funding allocations. Whilst UNISON is supportive of bringing together the tertiary education sector, there will undoubtedly be challenges in overcoming the long-term and deeply rooted perceptions that favour higher education.
8. UNISON believes that the contentious and challenging nature of the policy debate around Higher Education funding partially rests upon the fact that the 'royal route' to Higher Education often benefits and reinforces the privileges of the most affluent in society. Addressing the social inequalities which play out within the education system as a whole and which then goes on to shape people's life chances and opportunities within the labour market is an essential part of building a consensus around a fair and sustainable way of funding higher education.
9. UNISON acknowledges that Welsh Government had sought to overcome these challenges through changes to student finance and bursaries and UNISON welcomes these changes. However, there are also cultural challenges within and between each sector that will need to be considered further.
10. By comparison, the further education sector has been neglected and underfunded. UNISON believes that our education system has been hampered by a class-based dichotomy between education for a career and training for a job. Despite generations of discussion on the need for parity of esteem for all models of learning, the divide remains as wide as ever. There is

a fundamental need for all parts of the education sector to function coherently with shared concepts of knowledge, skill, and achievement.

11. UNISON agrees that the establishment of the Tertiary Education Commission will go some way to overcome these concerns, the establishment of the commission will not be enough and must be addressed proactively.
12. Outcome agreements and performance contracts could be considered as tools to progress strategic aims and will allow those in receipt of public funding to be better held accountable.
13. There is a need to recognise the differing structures across the tertiary education sector. The higher education sector has an all-Wales pay and grading system, at present this doesn't apply to further education which currently struggles with recruitment and retention because of inferior pay, terms, and conditions. If the sector is to function as one, a two-tier workforce must be guarded against.
14. Furthermore, sixth form colleges are allied to local government and so is another, differing structure that needs to be considered.
15. The commission and the benefits of unifying the tertiary education sector cannot be saved for the academics and professionals alone. Education and business support staff are integral to the tertiary education sector and must be valued as such. All staff should be directly employed within the sector and paid accordingly. All staff should be paid at least the foundation living wage.
16. Other types of adult education need to be fully considered – including workplace training and learning which gives many opportunities for developing core skills, confidence, and career progression for all staff, but particularly those on lower pay. Workers are learners and this element should not be separated out. It is important experienced workers can progress within their organisation and are able to access quality education throughout their workplace.
17. As we move towards carbon net-zero it is essential that we prioritise a just transition, and tertiary education will form a key part of that.