

**Senedd Cymru**  
**Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig**  
**Ymchwil a Datblygu**  
**RD07**  
**Ymateb gan: ColegauCymru**

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**Welsh Parliament**  
**Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee**  
**Research and Development**  
**RD07**  
**Evidence from: CollegesWales**



Senedd  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

15 November 2023

Dear Economy Trade and Rural Affairs Committee,

We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Economy Trade and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Research and Development.

ColegauCymru is an education charity which promotes the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning in Wales. We undertake research, policy development and provide practical support to FE colleges in Wales, working closely with Welsh Government, their agencies, and other stakeholders, we help shape policies affecting the FE sector, their learners and staff.

The Innovation Strategy for Wales highlights the critical role of colleges in creating an environment in which learners can develop the skills needed to participate in research, development, and innovation, and support current and future innovation opportunities. The training that FE can offer enables the development of emerging skills which in turn will allow firms to make the best use of new technologies. FE also supports companies, particularly SMEs, to introduce new technology, processes, or products. As anchor institutions, colleges are well-placed to offer SMEs advice and support to innovate, to improve their productivity, and to grow.

Skills and employability priorities underpin the Welsh Government's innovation strategy to ensure that prosperity is to be shared by all. These priorities are set out in Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills, and the more recent Net Zero Skills Action Plan. Colleges in Wales support these priorities, specifically:

- The Young Person's Guarantee: giving everyone under 25 the offer of work, education, training, or self-employment.
- Tackling economic inequality: working to improve labour market outcomes for specific groups.
- Promoting Fair Work: encouraging employers to make work better, fairer, and more secure.
- Raising skill and qualification levels, and the mobility of the workforce.

Evidence shows that innovation, entrepreneurship, and employment are inter-related. The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) finds that the deployment of new technologies has historically led to net job creation and increased productivity.<sup>1</sup> As such, colleges support programmes which help translate the nurture of innovation into the world of work and enterprise. As outlined in the Innovation Strategy, the very foundations of a culture of innovation lie in our schools, colleges, and universities.

Colleges in Wales undertake research and innovation in a variety of different ways, and work in partnership both with those in the education sector as well as in industry. A number of colleges have

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<sup>1</sup> The OECD Jobs Strategy, 'Technology, Productivity and Job Creation: Best Policy Practices', pg. 3. Find [here](#)



their own research centres, such as the Agriculture Research Centre (ARC) based at Coleg Sir Gâr's Gelli Aur Campus. The ARC is central to the development of the Welsh agricultural industry enabling a combination of excellent teaching, commercial farming and technology transfer, and has been recognised as the Centre for Excellence for land-based studies in Wales.

Coleg Sir Gâr is engaged with Map of Ag, a global pioneer in agricultural analysis and modelling technology, to provide a detailed roadmap for farm nutrient management planning going forward. Providing access to intelligently sourced data and information from farms enable businesses within the agriculture industry and food chain to maximise the impact of planning and decision-making. The partnership, using a local agent, supported the development of an electronic field monitoring system, combining both dedicated hardware/ software to support the efficient application of the nutrient-rich cake with a variable rate application system.

The South East Wales Colleges, in alliance with University of South Wales, have created the South Wales Civic Engagement Board (SWCEB).<sup>2</sup> The SWCEB has created firm connections between Further Education and Higher Education, to offer career development opportunities for colleagues in FE who wish to undertake research into the benefits of civic engagement, offering research mentoring and support.

The Knowledge Transfer Scheme (KTS) is a programme aimed at colleges and independent Work-based Learning (WBL) providers in Wales, to help them fund the delivery of 'masterclasses' and/or research projects designed to accelerate and build expertise for staff and increase learners' knowledge and learning experience in subjects such as digital, green skills, retrofit construction and engineering. The aim of the knowledge transfer is to bring in industry expertise with the express purposes of delivering new content and concepts, as opposed to teaching the current curriculum, this may in turn lead to development of new programmes of learning and lead to better learner experience.

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai run a number of KTS initiatives, including a Food Technology Centre at their Llangefni Campus, which supports a range of services to the food industry, including research and development, technical advice, knowledge transfer and training courses tailored specifically for clients. The Centre also provides the agri-food sector with skills that can be transferred to the rural workforce in order to nurture entrepreneurial activity. As well as a Digital Green Academy to support businesses who see the value of using new digital technologies, accelerate efficiency, productivity, carbon reduction and to reduce costs; as well as a Centre for Infrastructure and Skills which offers a high-quality Infrastructure skills training destination, with an underpinning ethos of expert partnership delivery and a platform for industry to engage with and promote innovative solutions and products, becoming the premier site of choice for product showcases in North Wales or wider.

Through strong, regional links with employers, colleges are a vital partner and critical asset when it comes to responding to local, regional, and national needs in the key identified areas of digital, green skills, retrofit construction and engineering. The KTP provides an important opportunity for enhanced partnerships between industry and FE programmes, enriching opportunities for occupational upskilling and providing opportunities for employers to engage with vocational programme delivery.

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<sup>2</sup> The South East Wales colleges are: Bridgend College, Cardiff and Vale College, The College Merthyr Tydfil, Coleg Gwent, and Coleg y Cymoedd. In partnership with the University of South Wales (USW), Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, and the Open University

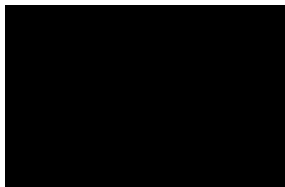


Therefore, Welsh Government should consider a more long-term approach to funding the Knowledge Transfer Scheme, and allow colleges to deliver research projects with flexibility over a longer period of time.

The response set out here must be understood in the context of the changing landscape of the post-compulsory education sector. The establishment of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) will see the new arm's length body take control of funding and oversight for research and innovation in Wales, and a whole system approach with an ability to provide funding to a wide range of education institutions.

In order for us to realise the full potential of colleges, to utilise their reach into the communities they serve, business they partner with, and become part of the innovation engine, the Commission must enable colleges to be able to engage with the breadth of research and development activities in Wales. Innovation in Wales' colleges is helping to tackle some of the greatest global challenges of our time, for example, climate change, and colleges' contributions in this space should be recognised and supported into the future.

Members and officials of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee would be most welcome to visit a college in Wales to explore this topic further if it would aid the inquiry further. If you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact the team.



**Dave Hagendyk**  
Chief Executive, Colegau Cymru

