

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2024-25](#).

This response was submitted to the [Finance Committee](#) consultation on the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25](#).

WGDB_24-25 25: Ymateb gan: Undeb Prifysgol a Choleg Cymru (Saesneg yn unig) |
Response from: University and College Union Wales (English Only)





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The University and College Union (UCU Wales) represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales. UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world. We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Committee's call for information.

Acknowledging the severe budgetary constraints emanating from Westminster, UCU Wales notes that this is not the first occasion upon which we have responded to a draft budget under conditions of crisis.

Throughout the Covid Pandemic, UCU Cymru commended Welsh Government for its action focused and collaborative approach. Moreover, as the public health emergency receded, we were excited to engage with an equality led recovery and reform process in which the value of education and the needs of the community took centre stage.

Drawing some inspiration from what might now seem like happier times, UCU Cymru remains committed to harnessing the diverse expertise of its members in delivering Welsh Governments economic, social and environmental ambitions.

However, to deliver upon its aspirations, Government must take action to ensure that the profession is supported through curriculum and qualification reform. Similarly, whereas distance was mediated by digital proximity in the last crisis, investing in social partnership not only serves to minimise conflict but can also liberate innovation.

Finally, UCU Cymru believes that everybody should be enabled to access the transformational power of education. Consequently, it is essential that provision for adult education is not raided as in previous years. Rather, we need to identify opportunities for new synergies which can widen access whilst targeting those in the greatest need.

1: Maintaining Pay Parity with Teachers

The 2016 decision to link college lecturers pay to that of teachers has delivered discernible benefits across the sector.

Not only has it ensured a long period of relative industrial peace but has also offered stability in terms of mid- and long-term financial planning.

If we are to tackle recruitment bottlenecks whilst adapting to various sector reforms, it is essential that we attract and retain the brightest and the best. Consequently, government must resist any temptation to decouple the pay of teachers and lecturers.

2: Workload & Professional Learning

The sector response to Covid 19 witnessed unprecedented workforce collaboration. Acknowledging that much of the knowledge and expertise sits with our members, Government has since sought to fund several projects to further develop the conditions for professional learning.

However, whether it be establishing action research as a currency for excellence or adapting the techniques of digital and blended learning to novel pedagogies, we need to create space in workload.

Welsh Government has backed several projects designed to promote staff wellbeing and reduce bureaucratic burden.

UCU Cymru notes the challenges of qualification and curriculum reform. Partly for this reason, funded workload projects must be protected as staff cannot be expected to subsidise transition through their unpaid labour. Furthermore, serious planning and thought must now be given to how we invest in reducing workload during, what we hope will be, more prosperous times.

3: Social Partnership

As recently illustrated in further education, social partnership provides us with the opportunity to disinvest conflict whilst liberating innovation. UCU Cymru's successful pilot in Coleg Cambria clearly demonstrates how rapidly genuine partnership can move beyond essential 'bread & butter' matters, to creatively engage with the most challenging issues of our time.

Since its inception, the partnership has spawned a number of unique projects; most recently an action research study around how artificial intelligence might be used to ameliorate lecturer's workload.

In our [response](#) to 'Wales – a new Economic Mission' UCU Cymru argued that social partnership must be at the forefront of innovation. However, securing these gains requires some limited, up-front investment (remission & facility time) alongside the political will to establish conditions of trust from the top down. In that respect, it is significant that Coleg Cambria's partnership structure hinges upon the relationship between the union lead and college principal which are then replicated throughout the organisation by partnerships at a departmental level. Similarly, the separation

between partnership and negotiating functions allows for deeper co-decision and agility.

Against the backdrop of bad fiscal weather, social partnership provides a unique opportunity not only to navigate the impact of underfunding but also co-create solutions to otherwise divisive problems (such as the introduction of novel technologies and achieving Net Zero). Noting these advantages, UCU Cymru recommends that government maintains and intensifies its investment throughout 2024/25

4: Adult Community Education – Family learning

We [know](#) that families experiencing poverty and trauma in childhood can affect the ability – and opportunities – to learn. Crucially, UCU Cymru apposes this to the recognized benefits accruing to children in families where one or more parent is engaged in meaningful adult education (usefully summarized in a 2012 Parliamentary Review).

Research demonstrates that child attainment is massively augmented where one or more parent is also engaged in learning. Community schools potentiate a range of exciting opportunities – not only as a point of access for parent adult education but also a safe setting in which help can be sought and found.

Whether through taster courses or extended project qualifications there are opportunities for engagement with FE and HE institutions as well as socially responsible business along with health and social care providers.

Ideally, the aim will be to deliver a coherent community curriculum which benefits parent and child alike. Other policy options might embrace individual family tuition and/or offering learning support to women pre and post maternity. When done sensitively, there is strong evidence to suggest that this might promote secure attachment and bonding. Occupational Therapists (with their focus on enabling people to develop skills that help them to engage with activities that are meaningful and useful to them) would be well placed to work with providers and lead on developing this community curriculum. Similarly, other peri-natal health professionals' midwives and family visitors can also usefully support this work.