

## **National Assembly for Wales**

### **Children and Young People Committee**

**EO 06**

#### **Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households**

##### **Evidence from : University and College Union**

1. The University and College Union (UCU Wales) represents more than 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales.
2. UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world: a force for educators and education that employers and government cannot ignore.
3. UCU was formed on the 1st June 2006 by the amalgamation of two strong partners – the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) – who shared a long history of defending and advancing educators' employment and professional interests.
4. We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the Children and Young Peoples Committee for their inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households
5. We note that so far the emphasis for the eradication of poverty through education has been on schools. Whilst we agree that schools can play an important part in working towards achieving this aim, we should not forget the role that Further Education can play. From the perspective of the post 16 sector, it is a concern that the value of Further Education does not take a more prominent role in the Welsh Governments agenda for eradicating poverty.
6. We agree that education is a powerful tool in improving social structure; however it is not enough to simply focus on the impact of compulsory education. Compulsory education may not always be appropriate to the individual needs of some young people. It may be more appropriate for some to gain life experiences or to change their individual circumstances, before the value of education can be realised. Education is a lifelong process and we need to ensure that barriers to this are removed. Careful consideration needs to be given to making sure that the opportunity to gain new skills and qualifications are not denied to older members of our community.

9<sup>th</sup> September 2013

The reduction in course choices and part time places alongside the charging of fees in FE in recent years can make it difficult for people wishing to return to education; an education that could provide a second chance and a way out of poverty for many adults and their children.

7. Further Education may provide a variety of opportunities for 16–19 years olds, but it also provides a crucial second chance for many adults. Part time and Adult Education courses are often the only means that adults have to second chance education. If these opportunities are stripped away through funding cuts and ring fenced provision for 16–19 year olds, we will remove further opportunities for learning from many adults in our communities.

8. Since 2006/07 the number of part time students in Wales has fallen by about one third. Between 2010/11 and 2011/12 part-time student numbers at FEIs declined by 5.1 per cent, and total local authority community learning fell by 7.5 per cent<sup>1</sup>. We would ask that the correlation between this and charges levied on part time courses by the colleges, be given consideration. We acknowledge the colleges found charging for part time courses a necessary strategy in order to make them “cost effective”. Despite there being grants and loans available for those on certain benefits, they do not always cover the full costs or additional costs such as childcare, which can be prohibitive to families on low incomes.

9. If we are to work towards the eradication of child poverty in Wales we need to consider the education of parents in Wales, to help them into employment that will lift the family out of poverty. It is important to consider Adult Education and training, when looking to reduce the number of jobless household in Wales. Education should not be the preserve of the wealthy, nor should it be available only to the young.

10. In considering the impact of jobless households on child poverty, we would also ask you to take into account the impact that the funding cuts will have on the number of staff in FEI’s. Already, we have seen annual rounds of voluntary redundancies and it is anticipated that the severity of the underfunding in the coming year, will prompt employers to consider making compulsory redundancies, which will likely increase in the number of jobless households. The effect of staff redundancies will in itself contribute to the perpetuation of child poverty, where parents become unemployed and household incomes are reduced. FEI’s not only

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<sup>1</sup> Further education, work-based learning and community learning in Wales, 2011/12 Welsh Government SDR 48/2013

provide education and training for the Welsh Community, they are also a valuable source of employment.

11. In addition to considering FEI's as a source of employment in our communities, we would like to highlight the UCU Wales current campaign on the use of part time hourly paid contracts and Zero Hours contracts. In terms of eradication child poverty, we need to ensure that adults in employment have contracts that provide a satisfactory degree of financial security. Whilst we accept that the use of such contracts may be of benefit in some circumstances, we need to be vigilant in protecting vulnerable employees from their overuse.

12. Many of our part time members have difficulty securing loans and mortgages, because of the variable nature of their wages. They may have to take on second jobs during the school holidays, to cover periods when they are not paid by the colleges. They can also face job insecurity, as their hours may change on a termly or annual basis. The impact of such contracts on children in Wales is that they may miss out on learning experiences, life opportunities and quality of housing afforded to children from families where there is a greater degree of job security and regular income. There is an irony in that those who are helping to deliver the means eradicate child poverty in Wales may also be a part of the problem.

13. We would like to ask that in the quest to eradicate child poverty in Wales, consideration of the impact on the community of the funding cuts currently proposed for FE. Schools and Universities are usually well funded, but FE is often squeezed. This is evident in the announcement of this year's FE funding allocations. In July of this year, Further Education Institutions were informed that there would be a 2.48% reduction in funding, on the previously announced allocations, equating to a cut of 1.5%. We understand that Ministers acknowledge that any reduction in budget is a cause for serious concern and we realise that allocations from Westminster are not in the control of the Welsh Government, but we ask you to consider very carefully the impact that such cuts in funding for FE will have on the causes of child poverty in Wales.

14. When investigating educational outcomes for children from low income households and the eradication child poverty in Wales please take into careful consideration the role and value of Further Education.