



**National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee:**

**Inquiry into City Deals and the
Regional Economies of Wales**

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Introduction

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales' Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee inquiry into City Deals and the Regional Economies of Wales. ColegauCymru is a charity and limited company that represents the 14¹ Further Education (FE) colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales and exists to promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning.²

ColegauCymru undertakes regular research, develops policy and provides responses based on the best available evidence, utilising our network of educators and policy experts. Our policy is informed by regular exchange of ideas and experiences facilitated by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme and through participation in the British Council's International Education Programme.

Colleges are major providers of general education provision in Wales, helping to produce some of the best learner outcomes. Colleges are the predominant providers of funded vocational and technical education in Wales, providing about 85% of the total provision.

Response

1. ColegauCymru looks forward to seeing further detail on both the Cardiff Capital Region and Swansea Bay City Deals. Any future North Wales Growth Deal should sit alongside the two existing City Deals in an equal partnership.

Cardiff Capital Region City Deal

2. The Cardiff Capital Region City Deal document mentions the benefits of universities and schools within the region and frequently refers to skills provision and employment but does not make direct reference to Further Education Colleges or how they might contribute to delivering the city deal.³ The report does however refer to the South East Wales Employment and Skills Plan (2016), the five key regional sectors and the need to match learning and training with employer requirements which is a key role of the further education sector. Positive discussions have subsequently taken place with FEIs and so whilst it is extremely disappointing not to see the importance of Further Education directly referenced in the report, this appears to be oversight rather than intention.

¹ The 14 include 10 FE corporations including St David's Catholic College; the two FE institutions – Adult Learning Wales; and The College Merthyr Tydfil, Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion which are part of university groupings.

² In this paper the terms 'FE college' and 'college' are used to cover FE colleges and FE institutions.

³ *Cardiff Capital Region Deal*, available at:

http://www.cardiffcapitalregioncitydeal.wales/Cardiff_Capital_Region_City_Deal.pdf

3. Colleges in South East Wales have engaged with City Deal representatives to discuss apprenticeship opportunities, jobs growth and adult community learning programmes. These discussions have included replicating the good practice model of shared apprenticeships in Ebbw Vale across other Local Authorities including Merthyr, RCT and Caerphilly Local Authorities. We would now like to see more engagement with the FE sector and further recognition of the important role that FE can play in, for example, encouraging long-term unemployed people back into training and employment. This will strengthen the City Deal and improve its chances of delivery against future targets set. In respect of the Metro, investment has taken place at Coleg y Cymoedd to ensure that the skills of the current and future railway workforce are available. The decision made to relocate Transport for Wales to the Taf Ely area, encourages regional specialism and broadens employment opportunities in other parts of the region, away from the capital.
4. ColegauCymru hopes that more meaningful engagement between FEIs and the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal might be underway. For instance, Centre for Cities have recently engaged with ColegauCymru on the Regional Economic Growth Partnership, which will be responsible for supporting the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Cabinet with regard to Cardiff Capital Region City Deal implementation. This is welcomed.
5. In respect of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Cardiff and Vale College report that various meetings have been undertaken and co-ordinated by several sections of Welsh Government (WG). The Apprenticeship unit of WG is particularly keen on promoting a City Region-wide Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA). Indeed, this was the subject of a collaborative meeting held in Newport in December 2016, initiated by the Department for Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning (SHELL). All FE colleges and local authorities were present when the possibility of extending the current ATA models was discussed (CAVC, BGCBC, Monmouth CBC, RCTCBC and CITB have examples. The model discussed parallels similar schemes in Australia.

Swansea Bay City Region

6. It is encouraging that the Swansea Bay City Region Board includes within its membership Barry Liles, Principal of Coleg Sir Gâr. Similar to the proposals and considerations put forward by the Capital region, the Swansea Bay City Deal must also recognise the wealth of support and talent provided by FE institutions and learners. Where proposals are being developed ColegauCymru believes that it is imperative that detail is outlined sufficiently early in the planning process to allow stakeholders to begin to plan, collaborate and define new solutions to the challenges of the region.
7. The 'Skills and Talent Initiative' of the *Internet of Economic Acceleration* aspect of the Swansea Bay City Deal, developed by the Regional Skills Partnership, is welcome

but lacks detail, at least available within the public domain, at this stage.⁴ Skills have always had a high prominence in the development of the Swansea Bay City Deal and was a key feature recognised as essential by UK Treasury. The Regional Skills Partnership has developed a Provider Group to work alongside the Main Board and Industry Sector Groups and which will be responsible for delivering the Skills Project. All FE Colleges in the region are represented on the Provider Group and a meeting is scheduled for early May 2017 to discuss their involvement. For this collaboration to bear fruit it is important that the necessary detail is provided to all partners, and in the interests of accountability, available for scrutiny by the wider public. This sharing of knowledge and the development of partnerships requires the development of trust.

8. In general then, the Swansea Bay City Deal is welcomed, and an initiative colleges are delighted to support. Nevertheless, there are some concerns about transparency and the openness of the process to date. Initially, work on the City Deal was led by the Swansea Bay City Region Board – with significant employer involvement. The bid appears to have been driven through by eight organisations – the four Councils, two universities and two Local Health Boards, with these eight organisations expected to form the overall project management Board. The governance arrangements and involvement of the private sector is unclear at present. There is concern that the Welsh Government has been side-lined. From the feedback received from colleges, we are not aware of any work reconciling the 11 projects (10 plus 1 overall skills project) to the Welsh Government’s priorities.

Regionalised Skills Delivery

9. ColegauCymru broadly supports the development of regional delivery of work based learning and vocational education more widely, in order to meet the specific needs of the respective regions of Wales, which often display highly localised needs and industrial and economic variation. However, CC asserts that the design, coordination and delivery of regionalised skills plans should be in the hands of those bodies with the knowledge as well as the experience and skills based on successful delivery to date.
10. Stakeholder engagement and transparency of planned activities will be key to ensuring a coordinated response to address some of the key challenges of all the emerging economic regions, not only those identified as City Deals and to create new opportunities for learning and new modes of delivering training based on the recognised international best practice such as the German Dual System. A specific focus on skills delivery will be an important part of this and the opportunity through apprenticeships is significant. However, ColegauCymru would remind the committee that work based learning, the majority of which is now led by Further Education

⁴ See: http://www.swanseabaycityregion.com/en/t1_ioea_p1_sati.htm

Institutions, is only one part of the overall development of the necessary skills mix within regions. StatsWales records 224,410 learners in Further Education, Community Learning and Work-based Learning for 2015-16. Of these, only 59,905 were involved in work-based learning, which is roughly a quarter (26.7 per cent). This does not take into account the additional 27,899 school pupils aged 16 or over for the same time period. This means that more than three quarters of people aged 16 or over studying at FE, at school, or as part of Community Learning are not part of work-based learning.⁵ We need to ensure that this wider picture is reflected when considering skills development.

11. The levy is forcing large employers to engage with the apprenticeship debate and this will create chances to increase opportunities across a wide range different groups. Engaging the private sector will remain a key aspect of any successful regional skills strategy, in particular the challenge of engaging SMEs, micro businesses and the entrepreneurial business community as we look to address key skill challenges across acknowledged priority areas such as STEM and digital, as well as the challenge of developing and maintaining a critical mass of skills in business leadership and management. A key to any regional economic delivery plan will be the need to address the perennial challenge of soft skills and to link with the strategies laid out by the Welsh Government's Employability Plan and those areas of skills required within the foundational economy.
12. The funding of 'big ticket' projects such as the Metro is an opportunity to ensure that the skills system supports specific as well as generic skills growth. Investment in physical capital has to be met with a similarly resourced commitment to developing human capital. There is also an opportunity within current planning to develop a model for other large infrastructure projects. Understanding the skills need will be important to ensuring that a talent pipeline is created to support large capital investments. The relevant bodies, City Deal Partnerships, Welsh Government and contractors should look again at how procurement clauses can support skills development opportunities particularly as the UK leaves the European Union.
13. It is difficult to argue against the proposed impact of the City Deals as more and better jobs, and higher skills levels naturally bring benefits. However, whether the current assessment is realistic remains to be seen. Consistent FE involvement is key as FE colleges form part of the necessary talent pipeline. It should be noted that all regions across Wales, irrespective of their delineation, are experiencing a decrease in

⁵ Source - Stats Wales, see: Learning programme numbers by provision type, mode and gender, available at: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Lifelong-Learning-Wales-Record/learningprogrammes-by-provisiontype-mode-gender> ; Pupils by local authority, region and age group, available at: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Pupils/pupils-by-localauthorityregion-agegroup> .

the younger workforce as demographic trends pass through the pipeline.⁶ Consequently any skills analysis must take account of the need to retrain and reskill older workers and ensure that opportunities are available for 'learn while you earn', digital and blended learning, as well as learning opportunities which can accommodate uncertain working patterns and multi-generational caring responsibilities.

14. Many contributors to our call for evidence in support of this consultation exercise have identified that there is a risk that both City Deals will ultimately operate mainly in the interests of Cardiff and Swansea. The potential that skills and human capital will converge by drawing more people from outside of those city centres and consequently further hollow out the populations of nearby towns with its impact on public services, including general and further education provision has been widely acknowledged. Steps must continue to be taken to avoid this and ensure that prosperity genuinely is increased and spread out across both regions.
15. This includes the importance of sub regional economies, including (but not limited to) the heads of the valleys economy which sits aside the A465 running from Neath to the 'Midlands engine' and which has a focus on advanced manufacturing. Links to other Welsh Government initiatives such as the Valleys Taskforce need to be taken into account, with an examination of how City Deals can support these sub regional economies.

Monitoring and Measuring the Impact

16. Increasing regional GVA, employment and equality of opportunity are enormous challenges. Whilst the evident risks of convergence, social dislocation and hinterland creation are acknowledged a concentrated focus on key areas will be important to ensuring resources are not thinly spread and wider strategic change can be enabled through the City Deal. Early benchmarking and the work of *Cardiff University State of the City Region Report* is important and can be used to monitor impact. Simplicity and flexibility of delivery will be important to ensure that projects are agile to respond to emerging needs. Any analysis and monitoring must also avoid the myopic or selective tendencies referenced in our response to the individual plans for Swansea and Cardiff, outlined above.
17. In this respect transparent and effective governance will be important. Also, it will be important to ensure that the skills aspects of regional focus are given due prominence afforded by the ability of lifelong learning existing networks such as the Regional Skills Partnership and the Wales Employment and Skills Board will support delivery.

⁶ See, for example, reference to falling numbers of 16-18 year olds referenced in Wales Audit Office, *Welsh Government oversight of further-education colleges' finances and delivery* (2017), page 17, available at: <https://www.wao.gov.uk/system/files/publications/FE-finances-eng-2017.pdf>.

18. In monitoring and evaluating the programmes more widely, as well as the specific skills needs that accompany them, the impact of the decision to leave the EU inevitably signifies a period of uncertainty. This will remain even after the June 2017 General Election. This period of change will have an unavoidable effect on the concept of City Deals (which is itself contested and evolving) as over the next two years their ability to generate the fiscal and economic returns to which they have committed, will be impacted by economic circumstances beyond control of the Boards. There is potential significant risk here with the Cardiff Capital Regional Deal stating that *'[i]n a scenario where a future Investment Fund Gateway is not achieved, leading to any reduction or cessation of City Deal grant, then it will be the responsibility of individual local authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region to manage the financial impact of this within their local authority budget, utilising reserves or surpluses as required.'*⁷
19. It should also be remembered that the initiative has the capacity to be the latest in a line of 'Emperor's New Clothes' strategies as City Deals as a phenomenon remain fairly unproven. In 2015, the UK National Audit Office reported on the first wave of city deals which began back in July 2012.⁸ While it identified that some programmes had had an early impact, it is noteworthy that it has taken cities and departments longer to implement some programmes that required more innovative funding or assurance mechanisms. Likewise, the report concluded that *'[i]t is too early to say if the deals will have any overall impact on economic growth'*.⁹ City Deals must not be seen as a panacea to the problems of each and every region.
20. The National Audit Office report highlighted the need for a robust, shared approach to measurement. For example, among first wave city deals there was no consistent methodology or shared set of definitions around key measures such as jobs which made comparisons between city deals difficult.¹⁰

The potential benefits offered by a possible Growth Deal for North Wales

21. Any initiative that brings investment into North Wales is broadly welcomed. Grwp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria are supportive and both signatories to the Growth bid. More widely, there is positive engagement between the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the FE sector. References are made to Further Education colleges and their important role, alongside universities, in the July 2016

⁷ Cardiff Capital Region Deal, para 21.

⁸ National Audit Office, *Devolving responsibilities to cities in England: Wave 1 City Deals* (July 2015), available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Devolving-responsibilities-to-cities-in-England-Wave-One-City-Deals-Summary.pdf>

⁹ National Audit Office, *Devolving responsibilities to cities in England*, pages 9-10.

¹⁰ National Audit Office, *Devolving responsibilities to cities in England*, page 10.

‘Growth Vision for North Wales’.¹¹ However, colleges engaging with the structures in the north note that the potential benefits of any such Growth Deal depend on what exactly is on offer and as is the case for their colleagues in the south and west, on the detail of any such deal.

22. To date, details remain unclear, with little information accessible in the public domain and a lack of transparency. Responders have highlighted that what exists is limited to some political enthusiasm and a line from UK Government that the current Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns MP, saw a growth deal for North Wales as a priority when he took up post in 2016.¹²
23. Our understanding is that the Growth bid predominantly began as a bid to improve train connectivity in North Wales. However, as it gathered pace and further partners were added, including Local Authorities, the bid is becoming broader and is almost a full blown Economic Development Plan for North Wales.
24. Skills (joined with worklessness and social reform) are now one of the four strands of the bid, along with Transport, infrastructure and services; Strategic sites, premises and housing; and Business innovation and growth. While the focus on skills is welcome there is some concern over the fact that this is led by one of the Local Authorities rather than Further Education or the Regional Skills Partnership. Local Authorities do not always have a detailed understanding of, or consistent engagement with, the FE sector and FE would be crucial to the skills element of any future Growth bid. The intention seems to be for the Regional Skills Partnership to be absorbed into the Joint Committee, controlled by the Local Authorities.
25. The FE sector is happy to work with Local Authorities and others as joint partners to give any initiative the best chance of success. It is important to ensure that there are no unintended consequences when drawing up the governance arrangements of any future Growth Deal. For example, FE colleges must retain their independent status and not be constrained from making decisions in the best interests of learners and local areas by any additional layers of governance. There should be no inadvertent return of the FE sector to Local Authority control.
26. Our understanding is that the North Wales Economic Ambition Board’s ‘Growth Vision for North Wales’ along with ‘Moving North Wales Forward’ is now being developed into a Growth Bid for submission in July 2017. However, North Wales FE colleagues have not seen any drafts of this document as it goes through this process. Updates from the team working on the bid are sporadic.

¹¹ North Wales Economic Ambition Board, *Growth Vision for North Wales* (July 2016), available at: <http://wcnwchamber.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016-08-Vision-for-North-Wales-Economy-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>

¹² See BBC news item from 14 March 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-39275121>

27. A formal Joint Committee is being set up as a Governance Vehicle for the North Wales bid, where the primary membership will be the Local Authority leaders. A recent update stated that “[t]he region has adopted a governance model ‘in principle’, which will include a statutory Joint Committee for Economic Growth supported by a specialist committee for transport, and a specialist and a broad-based committee which will fulfil the role of the Regional Skills Partnership. The Joint Committee partners will formally review a recommended constitution and inter-authority agreement over the summer of 2017 in readiness to formally constitute the Joint Committee in the autumn.” Within this, it is important that Welsh Government is not side-lined, similar to the concern raised around the Swansea Bay City Deal, as there is a need to ensure a coordinated approach and consistent prioritisation with the Welsh Government skills strategy. Likewise, there needs to be proper engagement with partners, crucially in the FE sector, over these developments.
28. The close liaison with the Cheshire and Warrington LEP Bid and the Mersey Dee Alliance, and focus on cross-border strategic planning is sensible, as is the account taken of the Industrial Strategy of the UK Government. However, more involvement of North Wales FE partners is vital and involvement with partners closer to home should not be lost in the effort to join up with those across the border.
29. Any future North Wales Growth Deal needs to sit alongside the two existing City Deals (Cardiff Capital and Swansea Bay) in an equal partnership.

The extent to which a similar growth deal approach could be of benefit to Mid Wales

30. In keeping with our earlier comments there is a danger that rural areas such as Mid Wales are left behind in the increasing focus on cities and trend towards urbanisation. The Mid Wales area does not fit with the outlines of the Cardiff or Swansea City Deals, or the potential North Wales Growth Deal. Investment and effort to support the economy of Mid Wales would be welcome but this needs to be tailored to the specific area. If published details on the potential North Wales Growth Deal are lacking and therefore difficult to appraise, how the approach would be applied to Mid Wales is even less developed. Russell George AM’s question to the First Minister (answered by Leader of the House, Jane Hutt AM) on a growth deal for mid Wales yielded little further information.¹³

¹³ See *Y Cofnod*, 14 March 2017, 13.59, available at: <http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/pages/rop.aspx?meetingid=4254&language=en&c=Record%20of%20Proceedings&startDt=14/03/2017&endDt=14/03/2017>

The degree to which the growth and city deals could solve or exacerbate existing inequalities, both within and between regions

31. There is a danger that areas outside of growth and city deal areas might become left behind. However, even within city deal areas, there is a risk that, unless carefully managed, the majority of benefits continue to accrue to the main city in the particular deal. Even within this, not all parts of a city have benefitted equally. For instance, in the example of Greater Manchester, a City Deal which is often cited as an example of success, levels of deprivation in parts of Manchester itself remain among the top ten per cent most deprived places in England.¹⁴ It has also failed to make progress on closing the GVA gap with London.¹⁵ Growth and City Deals need to carefully consider and ensure that benefits are felt across the city region as a whole. In the Swansea Bay City Deal, for instance, the needs of areas on the periphery of the region, like Pembrokeshire, must be fully taken into account and supported if the region as a whole is genuinely to prosper.
32. In terms of skills, Further Education institutions will be crucial to success and helping to narrow the wealth gaps which exist across regions. This is both in terms of young people but also encouraging and assisting people who have been out of the workplace to return. FE institutions provide a local and welcoming environment to those in need of basic skills as well as those seeking to develop higher level skills and must be central to the future of City Deals and growth deals.
33. For the Cardiff City Deal, Cardiff and Vale College noted that the Metro will play a vital role and it will be important to ensure that there is encouragement of inward investment across the region and employment opportunities are increasingly accessible. Understanding opportunity is also vitally important to ensure that young people are able to understand pathways and develop successful careers.

The degree to which the growth and city deals co-ordinate with Welsh Government strategy

34. ColegauCymru recognises that economic development must be everyone's business and that business challenges and economic effects do not respect borders or boundaries based on executive and legislative competence. Welsh Government economic policy has tended to be coordinated and directed from the civil service base in Cardiff, with centralised decision-making.¹⁶ It has, in our view often relied on an outdated model of thinking, focusing too readily on infrastructure rather than

¹⁴ See Peter Folkman et al, *Manchester Transformed: why we need a reset of city region policy* (CRESC, 2016), available at: <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/medialibrary/research/ManchesterTransformed.pdf>, page 8.

¹⁵ Folkman et al, *Manchester Transformed: why we need a reset of city region policy* (CRESC, 2016), page 8.

¹⁶ For further discussion of these issues, see Calvin Jones, *Prosperity and Place* (FSB Wales/Cardiff Business Schools, 2015), especially pages 18-19, available at: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/docs/default-source/Publications/prosperity-and-place-report.pdf?sfvrsn=1>.

human capital investment with a consequential over-reliance on foreign direct investment as opposed to endogenous growth. The further devolution of power to local authorities as seen in city deals runs counter to the Welsh Government approach to date. To a degree this change in emphasis is welcomed but it should be noted that is at best marginal to the model employed to date by the Welsh Government and its predecessor agencies, like the WDA. However, recent speeches by the Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates AM, whose portfolio also has responsibility for skills, suggest a different approach may be possible with a new economic strategy more focused on regional economies and a smaller number of national, foundational economy sectors, such as healthcare and energy. The emphasis on shaping local skills provision more closely around the specific needs of regions, employers and regional priority sectors, while developing more tailored interventions for those needing support into work, fits well with the offer from Further Education colleges across Wales.

35. It is also important that Wales takes a coordinated approach to development so that more regional strategies do not run counter to pan-Wales ones and vice versa. As referenced above, this includes the importance of supporting sub regional economies, and links to other Welsh Government initiatives such as the Valleys Taskforce.
36. The approach taken to work-based learning as part of City Deals and future growth deals is important, taking into account the existing activity in this area currently undertaken by colleges. It is vital to have clear integration between strategies and this will be particularly key in relation to ensuring joined up skills policy. To this extent Colegau Cymru is of the view that primacy in the development of economic strategy should sit with Welsh Government and its current or subsequent agencies and competent bodies rather than it being 'leapfrogged' by a Westminster agenda that bypasses both strategic vision and democratic accountability as set out in the devolution settlement.

We would also welcome comparative views on approaches taken by other growth deals and regions across the UK

37. As above, City Deals across the UK are still at a relatively early stage of development and remain unproven. With the first wave of city deals taking place less than five years ago in July 2012, the evidence base for what works and conversely, what doesn't, has largely yet to be established. The House of Commons Library Briefing Paper on City Deals provides a useful overview of City Deals approved to date, along with brief details of each and the targets set.¹⁷ While this sets out the focus of each City Deal, most are still too new to provide an indication of whether the approaches

¹⁷ Matthew Ward, *City Deals*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, Number 7158 (23 November 2016), available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07158/SN07158.pdf>.

have worked or whether individual City Deals would have done anything differently in hindsight and thus provide lessons for other areas.

38. The Greater Manchester City Deal is often cited as a successful example that others might emulate. However, in November 2016, this was critically reappraised by the research team at CRESC. They found that many of the key reports “presented variants on a standard, narrowly-based narrative of success, where the evidence was policy-based because reports selectively cite statistics to justify claims about the success of the Manchester (or in some cases Greater Manchester) model”.¹⁸ A degree of caution and a critical approach to evaluating evidence is necessary in order to make the best use of resources allocated to City and Growth Deals in Wales.
39. Finally, Welsh language considerations need to be embedded across all new and existing City and Growth Deals in Wales, whether this is in terms of identifying Welsh language skills gaps in priority projects for specific regions, ensuring that skills offers can be taken up through the medium of Welsh, or consideration of how Welsh language communities will share in the planned increases to prosperity.

40. Conclusion

- ColegauCymru supports the Welsh Government’s regional approach to skills and economic development.
- There has been a lack of consistent engagement with Further Education institutions and there is also a lack of detail regarding expectations of what is and will be required from skills providers.
- The General Election in June 2017 will do little to resolve the uncertainty regarding the future progress of city deals while the implementation of the decision to leave the European Union provides an ongoing dimension of insecurity.
- Executive authority regarding city deals must rest with the Welsh Government (rather than being bypassed by UK Government) with accountability to the National Assembly for Wales.

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¹⁸ Folkman et al, *Manchester Transformed: why we need a reset of city region policy* (CRESC, 2016), page 6.