

02 October 2023

Email Only

Response to A Renewed Economic Mission for Wales

Opening Notes

The University and College Union (UCU Cymru) represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, IT staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales. UCU Cymru is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world.

UCU Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to a Renewed Economic Mission for Wales. In addressing the most pressing challenges to prosperity and economic expansion, Wales continues to suffer low productivity when compared with London and most other English regions. Whereas many of the accepted factors (such as lesser agglomeration and infrastructure) are difficult to influence in the short to medium term, getting education and 'skills' right will provide workers with the requisite agility to grow a high-performing, fair work economy.

Similarly, unleashing the potential of Welsh research and development can, where augmented through social partnership and social contract, provide the perfect space in which socially rooted businesses can thrive.

Accepting that there are no magic bullets, our three-part response provides a blueprint for an equality led boost to productivity.

Whilst part 1 presents an outline plan to develop the 'Welsh missing middle', Part 2 takes uncompromising account of the processes behind intergenerational poverty, proposing whole-scale reform in qualifications and assessment. Finally, whether in terms of workload, contractual security or professional collaboration, part 3 concludes with an overview of the tools which educators will require to get the job done.

As a passing note, we deliberately avoid addressing the need to expand and develop degree apprenticeships, feeling that choppy fiscal weather might occlude the otherwise useful conversation which Wales needs to have. That said, we

hope that government will recognise the associated opportunities offered by Wellbeing Licensing and Collaborative Hubs (Pages 4 & 5).

Part 1 - Growing the Welsh Missing Middle - Partnership & Collaboration

Despite previous efforts to develop a balanced economy, Wales still lacks a critical mass of medium-sized, socially rooted SME's. Referencing the devolved German experience, UCU Cymru explains how social partnership and academic collaboration can combine to nurture 'the missing middle' as a part of a wider social contract.

For as long as the Welsh economy retains its 'hour-glass' shape, opportunities for fair work, innovation and academic partnerships in commercial RDI will remain limited. [Responding](#) to Welsh Government's Consultation on Corporate Joint Committees, in the winter of 2020, UCU Cymru wrote:

"During the past 9 months, we have seen how adaptations under conditions of shock can boost the pace of innovation. In the same way that the pandemic has replaced physical distance with digital proximity, our exit from the European Union is likely to accelerate developments in automation. Tomorrow's Industry 4.0 & 5.0 will require new patterns of working and habits of mind. Capabilities such as agility, collaboration and creativity are essential to the success of a modern economy. Whilst Prosperity for All and 'Fair Work' provide useful frameworks, just transition must be complimented by a collaborative post-16 education sector which makes use of creative pedagogies."

Clearly, if Wales is to grow a high-quality industrial ecology in which good jobs are grown and retained, it is imperative that we develop organic industries at the same time as attracting external investment. However, skills partnerships and FEI's currently model provision based on historical and short-term vacancies. Accepting that we cannot build the houses of today with the bricks of tomorrow, thought needs to be given as to how education and investment... interacts with communities, FEI's, business (particularly SME's) and wider areas reserved by government; particularly funding for education and training; progression pathways and Adult Community Learning."

Previous attempts to attract external investment have not elicited the growth and stability that we would have liked to see. Attracting and sustaining Welsh household names" such as Tata cannot alone address longstanding issues such as low productivity and bottlenecks in training.

Consequently, whilst the contribution of larger firms to Welsh GVA might seem disproportionately high, much of this can be attributed to the effects of operating in the upper reaches of their supply chain with access to UK and international markets. As we have seen, the disruption generated by Brexit and Covid renders such models vulnerable to relocation – particularly where the parent company has access to mobile capital.

Wales's ability to grow its middle will not only determine the health of the future Welsh economy but also play a large part in determining whether social partnership takes hold in the private sector. Acknowledging how the OECD and other organisations link successful social partnership with effective innovation partnerships with PCET institutions, it is significant that the 'Mittelstand' provides the backbone for both across the devolved German states.

Clarifying the relationship between Welsh Government, Regional Partnership Boards and Corporate Joint Committees can provide a structure for this work. Similarly, the Welsh Regional Investment Plan and Wales Innovation Strategy provides a basic blueprint. However, neither offer the conditions – a flexible and agile workforce equipped with the capabilities, skills and habits of mind necessary to navigating a rapidly evolving economy.

To that end, UCU Cymru takes this opportunity to address some of the key ingredients:

Prioritising Innovation in Social Partnership

As recently illustrated in the post compulsory education sector, 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.

UCU Cymru argues that social partnership should 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 gloomy budgetary decisions, 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 proposes at least one method through which government, academia and business can work together to mainstream social partnership as a vehicle for prosperity and fair work.

Social Partnership, Social Contract and Broader Collaboration

As mentioned, throughout Western and Northern Europe, social partnership structures rest upon the existence of a 'Mittelstand'.

If we accept that social partnership can foster innovation then it is possible to conceive of a way in which it might also contribute to the development of socially rooted, medium sized SME's, particularly when they are nurtured by access to RDI in Welsh higher and further education institutions. Inspired by the vision of an innovative and socially beneficial 'middle', UCU Cymru proposes:

A Well Being Licence - in line with the Future Generation Act and the social contract outlined in Prosperity for all, we urge Welsh Government to develop and implement a Well Being Licence. A wellbeing license is a stipulation on hybrid bodies or providers to the public sector; that they can only enter the market for goods or services if they have met criteria ensuring they achieve standards linked to wellbeing goals. This pan-Welsh scheme will give enterprises the right to trade in public sector markets if they offer social and wellbeing returns, such as social partnership, contractual security or offering decent progression and training routes for staff. UCU does not advocate protectionism. Rather, in addition to the principle that no public funds should ever contribute towards labour exploitation, it is our belief that Welsh Government can make greater use of those incentives which sit within its competence. To that end, we are keen to identify policies which anchor public finance to benefit communities and strengthen the Welsh economy.

Collaborative Hubs - Embedding fair work in the new curriculum is only the start. As the new commission for Tertiary Education & Research embeds, innovation emerging from social partnership will need to feed back into Economy and Skills. We would seek to enhance this process by enabling institutions and academic staff to become more adaptive through social partnership and genuine professional learning. Having addressed the key barrier of workload, the object will be to develop a transformative and genuinely symbiotic relationship between post 16 education and the private sector. Ultimately, this can feedback as an added incentive through which participating or licenced businesses will have access to R&D and bespoke assistance in market development, technological and digital adaptation and as well as long-term planning which is generally only encountered in cooperative enterprises. In adopting this method, social partnership can play a transformative role both in promoting a sustainable base for fair work and building the conditions for its future development. Moreover, with government acting as convenor, the hub model can also be used to mainstream these advantages to small businesses.

Part 2 - Fair Work & the 'Lifelong Dread' of Learning – the Case for Family Learning and Qualification Reform

Single parent families have become distant from education and fair work. Adopting a family whole, we explore a range of remedies which can simultaneously reengage parent and child in a beneficial learning experience

whilst also tackling the systemic structural failures which contribute to withdrawal from educational opportunity.

Having set out a pragmatic vision for boosting productivity and innovation, we need to return to state of the Welsh economy as it stands. A high-performing, fair work economy will require workers who not only possess the knowledge and skills but also the competencies, capabilities and habits of mind which are crucial to lifelong learning. As a trade union, we value the advantages of collective bargaining but, as educationalists, we also recognise that individual workers can only bargain with the skills that they bring to the table. Crucially, there are tens of thousands of Welsh families who are locked out from the transformative power of education and work. Moreover, many of these are forced to reproduce the conditions for poverty, partly due to dysfunctions in our assessment and qualification system.

In our most recent [response](#) to Welsh Government's Draft Child Poverty Strategy, UCU Cymru explored the relationship between distance from fair work and educational opportunity. We found that:

- That the risk of deep and persistent poverty was dramatically greater in [single parent families](#)
- That the [fraction](#) of children living in a lone-parent family where their parent was working rose from 50% in 2007–08 to 54% in 2013–14 and reached 62% in 2019–20.
- That this principally [attributable](#) to the way in which benefits are linked to prices as opposed to increases in wages – a significant factor in as far as the incomes of the low paid are frequently subsidized by state benefits

UCU Cymru [knows](#) that trauma in childhood can affect the ability and opportunities to learn. Crucially, we contrast this to the recognised [benefits](#) attaching to children in families where one or more parent is engaged in meaningful [adult education](#) (usefully [summarised](#) in a 2012 Parliamentary Review).

Recent work [published](#) by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network explored the relationship between poverty and trauma. The report concluded that families exposed to urban poverty face a disproportionate risk of exposure to trauma and of becoming '[trauma-organized systems](#)'. Factors associated with urban poverty such as low neighbourhood safety, daily hassles, and racial discrimination have been shown to increase the risk that trauma will negatively impact family functioning.

The erosion in family functioning jeopardizes the ability to support learning. Consequently, both compulsory, PCET and adult educators must be supported towards developing pedagogies which are sensitized to the traumatic context of urban and rural poverty.

Furthermore, evidence (usefully summarized in this [article](#)) suggests that, whilst girls and boys, enter early years feeling equally capable, by age six girls already tend to consider themselves less talented. Driven by external socialisation, girls of all socio-economic backgrounds tend to assign 'failure' to ability. This is in contrast to boys who are more likely to cite external factors outside of their control. Whereas UCU Cymru hopes that the new curriculum will address this issue, it is clear that young women are currently at greater risk of internalising notions of traumatic failure.

Sadly, the current qualification regime is more likely to reproduce patterns of poverty and trauma. ASCEL's [Forgotten Third](#) stresses how GCSE's necessarily fail a third of the disproportionately most disadvantaged children. Similarly, the National Education Union's [New Era Report](#) focuses on the process by which the UK fetish for examinations and memory testing not only penalises the poorest children but also curtails teacher creativity and opportunities for learner group work.

This is significant given that the academic consensus (Fulham, Hargreaves, Sahlberg, Quinn, etc) indicates that collaborative learning or 'deep learning' provides the best opportunity for closing the attainment gap.

In '[Deep Learning](#)' the authors utilise over 60 case-studies to illustrate how collaborative pedagogies rooted in socially relevant projects can excite agency and promote equity. Whilst many of these case studies are remarkable in their own right, the most significant finding is worth reproducing in full;

"In implementing deep learning in scores of settings, we began to see that under the right conditions immersive learning reaches everyone. It was this realisation that led us to the 'equity hypothesis' referred to above: Deep learning is good for all but is especially effective for those most disconnected from schooling"

Put differently, it would be equally fair to say that the acquired individual benefits of enhanced social capital (such as private tuition and access to knowledge networks) can become collectively advantageous in a collaborative setting. This should come as no surprise – as Pasi Sahlberg points out, "A child's learning is a function more of the characteristics of his classmate than of those of the teacher." (Bristol Teacher Fest, 2022)

Whereas the immediate consequences of not achieving a 'C Grade' will dramatically curtail progression in education and employment, the longer-term consequences can be best characterised as a 'lifelong dread of learning' – a very powerful form of trauma in its own right.

Seen from this perspective, it is easy to understand how a working mum, whose life circumstances and negative experience of formal schooling dissuades her from reengaging with education, will remain trapped in poorly paid work. What's more, her small family will also experience poverty in a domestic setting where attitudes towards education are mixed at best. Consequently, having lost the habit of learning, she will be ill equipped to support her children's progression even while their daily exposure to the reality of poverty makes them that much

more vulnerable to the same traumatic processes which set them on their painful journey.

When confronted with such a wicked paradox, the policy objective must be clear. Government, providers and educators must enable and motivate mum to access education in 1: away that signals clear advantage & hope and, 2: a form which is both trauma informed and synchs with her busy life. Similarly, we must also address the systemic failures which endanger her children so that future generations are not forced to confront the same disadvantage. Above all, we must try to get the family learning together.

Without reproducing our recommendations in full, UCU Cymru recommends:

1: Coherent Pathways and Exciting Progression Opportunities: if government wishes to deliver upon its ambition of a Welsh 'second chance nation', proper funding will be key. Welsh Adult Education is yet to recover from the eviscerating cuts imposed in 2012/13. That said, some of the debate which currently surround the new Commission (for Tertiary Education and Research) risks missing several key points.

A parent experiencing poverty should be absolutely clear about the progression opportunities which follow on from a micro-module or basic skills course. Moreover, whether their pathway is vocational or academic, there must be a clear map plotting destinations from level 1 all the way through to level 6. UCU adult educators describe the confidence and near addictive quality which can accompany late learning – particularly where the student has overcome objective barriers and previous negative experience. **To harness this verve, Government needs to fund progression to at least level 3 and ensure that wider policy, whether in relation to childcare, EMA or Welsh Benefits support a parent-learner to access education in a way which synchs with the rhythm of their own lives.**

2: Community Schools & Learning Families: [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.** As a strong aside, UCU Cymru strongly recommends that these spaces remain separate from any hint of conditionality. The experiences of several NGO's demonstrated the devastating trust impact on Community First Hubs when they became destinations for UK DWP mandates and instruction. Unsurprisingly, parents seek to avoid settings which they associate with the sanctioned withdrawal of basic life-support.

More positively, whether through taster courses or extended project qualifications (see below) 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.** Where 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.** Finally, children and parents with disabilities require innovative, specialist services to deliver both health and social care. Whilst falling beyond the scope of this consultation, UCU Cymru recognises how an integrated national care service can facilitate these needs.

3 Qualifications and Assessment – Reform fit for the Future: In our submission to Welsh Government’s Draft Innovation Strategy qualifications and assessment in some depth. For the purposes of this consultation it is enough to say that UCU Cymru explored the relationship between inequality, say that, despite some promising signals from the qualification regulator, our reliance on cliff edge examinations will continue to reproduce the forgotten third of learners who are most likely to experience poverty in later life. Outside the UK, no other jurisdiction subjects 16 years olds to high-stakes examinations. **Government should thus be clear about the wider purpose of GCSE’s and consider how they can be adapted to a European norm which finds young people in education to at least 18.**

Looking more widely, the OECD, have consistently [identified](#) lifelong learning as a crucial lever in equipping workers with the diverse skills, competencies and capabilities necessary to thrive in a transitional economy. Moreover, the availability of staff skilled in areas such as complex problem solving, critical thinking and emotional intelligence (p42 DL) will prove integral to the development of socially rooted SME’s.

Sometimes (if improperly!) described as ‘non-cognitive skills’, [competencies such as creativity and critical reflection are highly transferrable and provide the equipment for independent learning. Given the almost insurmountable challenges in predicting future skills needs, it would be sensible to afford equal value to transferrable skills alongside knowledge, numeracy, literacy and ICT skills as agile components in future proofing as well as preparation for lifelong learning.](#)

Sadly, outside the vocational sector, our education system does not privilege qualities such as collaboration, grit and independent learning – all of which will equip workers to bargain for fair work in tomorrow’s economy. Rather, attainment is too often measured as an ability to regurgitate drilled knowledge at short order – much to the chagrin of PCET educators and business alike. Responding to this failure, the [Rethinking Assessment](#) movement carry a wealth of resources including a concise [Blueprint for Change](#).

Either way, noting the pace of Welsh qualification reform, **both government and Qualifications Wales need to give due consideration to the socio-economic impact of their decisions.** UCU Cymru does not oppose the judicious use of examinations as a balanced component amongst a wider suite of

multi-modal assessment. However, for as long as our qualification and assessment system remains so heavily wedded to memory testing, teachers will have no option but to teach to that test. Putting aside the vandalism that this will do to the new curriculum, there is no good reason to believe that children from disproportionately poorer backgrounds will not continue to be failed!

4: Extended Project Qualifications – Bringing Post Compulsory Education into Schools: Addressing the question of what an equitable qualification system might look like, we stress the need to embed deep learning, collaborative work and the habit of independent research.

Happily, in our [response](#) to Qualifications Wales 'Full Offer', we identified an existing novel qualification which, in addition to offering a template, addresses many of these challenges.

Emerging from England, the Extended Project Qualification embeds the learning dispositions favoured by UCU Cymru whilst also offering a truly game changing opportunity for civic engagement/co-creation with HEI's, business and a range of stakeholders. Borrowing from what is good in Singapore, there is an obvious advantage in engaging institutions and employers whose trust and confidence will ultimately underwrite the value of most qualifications. Moreover, aside from providing the PCET sector with a valuable occasion to perform its civic mission/strategic duty to achieve curricula coherency, the EPQ and associated School Citizen Assemblies compliments the movement towards community schools.

Quoting directly from the Edge Foundation, the benefits are summarised as:

- Develop university, FE and schools as hubs which can engage with local organisations and communities to make a real difference through education and social action.
- Tackle problems of environmental sustainability and climate change by bringing together schools, climate change experts, young people and communities to enact change within their local communities as well as forging links in isolated rural and semi-rural settings
- Encourage greater agency, creativity, inclusivity and empathy of different stakeholder perspectives through approaches such as challenge led learning and other innovative pedagogies and practices.
- Promote equity, equality and diversity by creating spaces for different voices and perspectives around social justice issues and climate change.
- Embed greater levels of knowledge, skills, higher order thinking, empathy, collaboration, creativity and real-life problem solving into curriculum design and pedagogies within schools and universities.
- Develop templates, toolkits, platforms and prototypes that can be scaled up nationally (and internationally) to support and empower change and encourage processes of civic and community engagement, learning, collaboration.

Recognising the qualifications transformational potential in a community school setting, **UCU Cymru strongly recommends that Welsh Government work with the qualification regulator and participating schools/institutions to pilot a Welsh EPQ, taking care to monitor comparative attainment outcomes.**

Part 3 Scaffolding Change – Equipping Professional and Trusting the Teacher

Teaching competencies fit for the future will require the necessary professional autonomy, tools and space. Teachers need freedom from heavy workloads and bureaucratic burden whilst contractual security will attract and retain the very best research staff.

Delivering deep learning across a range of future proofed qualifications will require educators to develop innovative approaches and pedagogies. Similarly, supporting deep learning through creative and socially grounded assessment necessarily entails moving away from standardized techniques (such as 'teaching to the test') towards a greater emphasis on collaborative learning between staff as well as learners.

Whether understood as 'communities of practice' or 'whole school approaches', the international evidence indicates that professional autonomy, when combined with freedom from the onerous burden of misdirected external assessment, tends to deliver both improved and more equitable learner outcomes.

In Finland – an OECD superstar, the basic assumption is that education is a collaborative process and that it is cooperation and networking between professionals which raise the quality of education. Government works with the profession to establish a clear but flexible national framework for locally based curriculum planning. Sharing some similarities with new Welsh school curriculum, institutions are encouraged to innovate teaching around widely defined national goals and arrive at personalised learning opportunities.

Crucially, a commitment to equity lies at the heart of this work. The Wales Program of government seeks to foster a more equal nation by emphasizing that all children should have equal prospects for educational success. In contrast, competitive models necessarily tolerate a high degree of inequality, betting on market forces and performance management to punish 'failure' thus raise 'standards'.

This is significant in as far as it speaks to a central question; if we invest in professional learning to move towards a more collaborative system of education, how can we be sure that teaching will improve?

Referring to the current academic debate, the simple answer is 'trust the teacher'. Remarkably, there is little evidence to support the claim that enforcing external school evaluation systems and standardised testing promotes better learning or outcomes. Rather, the assumption that all learners should be

educated by rote to the same paper targets not only stifles pedagogy but also serves to de-professionalise teachers by reducing their craft to a series 'measurable' actions.

High functioning, innovative societies empower teachers and invest in professional learning precisely because this delivers better outcomes. The innovative strength of professional learning communities is also evidenced by their greater agility in adapting to new challenges. Most recently, this was demonstrated by Finnish, German and Dutch education settings rapid adjustment to digital delivery under conditions of Pandemic shock.

The research of Pasi Sahlberg and Andy Hargreaves demonstrates the advantages of building a culture of responsibility and trust within the profession. Such a culture will necessarily value teacher professionalism and judgement in determining what is best for schools. **Drawing on these lessons, UCU Cymru focuses on the benefits of collaborative professional learning and can already point to promising findings from our Welsh Government funded professional learning project.**

There is a crucial need to ensure that time and space is created in educators' workload to enable collaboration. Sahlberg cites OECD figures ([Finnish Lessons 3.0](#) p.113) to demonstrate that there is no correlation between net instruction time in primary/lower secondary school and net performance, when measured via PISA test results.

Indeed, several jurisdictions are shown to perform better with around 40% less formal teaching time. Although Sahlberg characterizes this paradox as 'Test less – learn more', (p114), all the sources agree that deep learning, in common with collaborative professional learning which scaffolds effective pedagogies adds value to time spent teaching.

We contrast this with the practice of 'over teaching' or using past papers to drill model responses across an increasingly broad range of material.

Consequently, UCU Cymru recommend that Estyn is funded to deliver an extensive thematic review of collaborative practise in compulsory and post compulsory settings. Depending upon the outcome, we also strongly recommend that Estyn incorporate positive opportunities for teacher collaboration and action research/professional enquiry into its inspection protocol.

Innovation in HE Early Careers – A Fair Deal for Research Staff

Professor Graeme Reid's '[Strength in Diversity Report](#)' (2020) sets out a transformative plan by which the sector can capture a greater share of UK research grants by collaborating in areas of joint interest. Moreover, in 2021

HEFCW [acknowledged](#) the need to ensure that "future innovation policy do more to encourage universities to develop their translational research activities to bridge the gap between research and innovation in Wales", elaborating "a new

innovation strategy must be accompanied by investment in the skills, capabilities and resources needed to support innovation". **Whilst UCU Cymru endorses both objectives, we are concerned by the lack of investment in one of the main, enabling factors – the post graduate researchers (PGR's) who undertake the majority of research work, scaffolding Wales' contribution both at home and internationally.**

HEFCW's '[Research and innovation](#)' – a Vision for Wales' envisages "that research environments will be strengthened via a culture that promotes and supports integrity, diversity, inclusivity and researcher mobility."

Sadly, this does not reflect the experience of many PGR's.

In May 2022, UCU published [report](#) which presented the findings of a survey into the experiences and needs of 955 postgraduate researchers in UK higher education (including Welsh institutions). Issues highlighted by respondents can be grouped into three categories:

1. Insufficient income and/or funding and the associated workload and time costs
2. Insufficient specificity in training and the formal requirements of the PhD for career development
3. Insufficient interpersonal support and integration of PGRs within universities

Low pay and/or the ability to meet the costs of the PhD was the biggest issue for the majority of PGRs. It was noted that this would likely have a knock-on effect on issues of health and wellbeing, concerns about workload and worries about career progression. Extra casualised work outside of the PhD was not considered to be an effective solution, with survey comments often describing significant underpayment and unfair workloads where adequate work opportunities could be accessed.

The report also highlights structural barriers across a range of equality streams including sex, disability and race. Adopting an intersectional approach, these obstacles are frequently seen to combine with socio-economic background to privilege those who can draw upon other resources such as parental assistance.

As with qualifications and assessment, Wales cannot afford to squander talent on the basis of class predestination. The work of postgraduate researchers is of far greater value than they are paid (or in some cases pay to do!).

Successfully completing a PhD' must be about more than just 'surviving' broken systems and a lack of support. PGRs must be enabled to thrive through the provision of adequate support and resources to do research they care about, to be able to build meaningful careers in relevant fields, and to live well. Currently, systems and processes do not provide this support efficiently or fairly. Efforts by PGRs to meet their needs in one of these areas can mean trading off or neglecting needs in the others. As a result, getting

through the PhD can often be as much in spite of the way postgraduate research is structured as it is because of it.

UCU Cymru supports the ambition to establish a Welsh innovation culture. However, in order to scaffold it, we must urgently address the plight of some of our chief innovators!

Finally, we are concerned by the proliferation of insecure contracts throughout the wider university research ecology. As a case in point, universities who move staff from fixed terms contracts to open ended contracts with relevant factors do so to avoid having to objectively justify keeping them on fixed term contracts. Open-ended contracts with relevant factors are no different to fixed term contracts. Staff on these contracts face;

- Collective redundancy process if not enough funding coming in (not dependent on 'their' project)
- Potential to be assigned projects that are not in their area of interest
- Prioritisation is based on teams needs not personal interests
- Paperwork associated with working across funding streams (timesheets etc.)
- Cognitive challenge to working across too many studies – particularly if they are in quite different areas

Staff on open contracts **without** relevant factors enjoy superior working conditions, including:

- Greater job satisfaction
- Stronger long-term relationships with colleagues
- Easier-to-anticipate workloads
- Enhanced feelings of loyalty
- Strengthened employment rights
- Career development opportunities

Accounting for the ending of at least 30 projects, the recission of EU structural funds has already done significant vandalism to Welsh research. Acknowledging the deep funding problems existing throughout Welsh higher education, we need to accept that if Wales wishes to grow, attract and retain the best researchers, Welsh universities will have to offer greater contractual security.