

UCU Wales Congress - 2 March 2019;

Draft KW speaking note

Good morning.

I am delighted to be here today to share my thoughts on some matters of interest.

When I agreed to continue as Minister for Education within the new First Minister's government, he and I renegotiated the Progressive Agreement which set out our goals and aspirations for education in Wales.

I am passionate about a Wales which can provide equal opportunities for everyone to reach the highest standards.

High quality education is the driving force for social mobility, national prosperity and an engaged democracy, and our reforms to higher and further education mean that funding and opportunities are available to benefit learners of all ages.

It's a long-term investment..... investing in the next generation of entrepreneurs, educators, scientists and public servants that will drive Wales's future prosperity and success.

Over the last two years we have started to deliver our ambitious education priorities:

- Wales is the only European nation to deliver equivalent living costs support – grants and loans – for full and part-time undergraduates and postgraduates;
- We have significantly increased support for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- We are delivering the single biggest investment in support for teachers since devolution;
- And we are well on our way to transforming the curriculum.

But there is still more to do.....:

Our new curriculum will embody what we want - what we expect – our future citizens to become, and gain from learning.

Looking ahead, it is vital that we continue to engage with unions, universities, colleges, and employers - beyond schools - with its development.

Which is why I was pleased to see the recommendations in the recent Institute of Welsh Affairs report. Practical steps to ensure that curriculum reform in Wales can be integrated with and supported by FE, HE, and business. Aligning with other policy areas to allow seamless progression from compulsory education.

When the consultation begins in April I shall be asking people across Wales to contribute to the debate.

I want to hear about what works well and what needs improvement, to create a world-class system that gives learners the skills to develop sustainable, rewarding careers in the 21st century.

Improving education is a national mission.

... to raise standards and opportunities for learners from our most disadvantaged backgrounds through targeted support,

... to reduce the attainment gap,

...to build a lifelong learning entitlement for adults,

...to deliver a system that is a source of national pride.

Teaching staff are at its heart, whether they deliver academic or vocational courses, or a mixture of the two, they need to know that their hard work is highly valued.

Which is why I was pleased to be able to approve a request for additional support for FE pay this year and next, acknowledging the exceptional circumstances following the UK Government's decision to ignore its own 1% public sector pay cap and award 3.5% for teaching staff.

I want to thank and congratulate you for the successful outcome of the pay deal, while recognising that the situation for HE is still to be resolved.

By committing additional funding we can maintain pay parity in Wales, although I accept that there is an ongoing discussion to be had about workload.

I have also asked officials to closely monitor the pension situation.

As autonomous bodies, HE and FE institutions are responsible for employment matters, including pensions. Welsh Ministers cannot play any formal role in these discussions.

I appreciate the challenges these changes present for institutions. However, we as government are not in a position to offer any guarantees to underwrite the increases. The key is that Westminster needs to provide core funding.

Welsh Government are prepared to assist in any way we can in discussions or negotiations with the UK Government.

I hope that any adverse effect on the reputation or future sustainability of the sector in Wales can be limited. My greatest concern is always the impact on students.

I have so far been able to deliver on my expectation that funding to the sector would increase year on year over the lifetime of this government.

The HE sector has benefited from our funding reforms, with overall income having increased by over £250m since 2012.

As the statutory regulator of HE in Wales HEFCW has in place a number of processes to ensure sound financial management and robust governance within the sector.

We have similar processes in place for FE.

We will ensure a stable and sustainable future for our further and higher education sectors by continuing our commitment to the most progressive and equitable student support system in

the UK, providing living costs support to full-time, part-time undergraduates and post-graduates.

Following successful implementation of the changes to the undergraduate package of higher education student finance in 2018, changes to the Postgraduate Master's package are due to be implemented for the next academic year. This will complete my package of reforms for higher education funding and I am pleased that it has been well-received by students so far.

The package also ensures that our higher education institutions have access to a sustainable level of funding.

You will know that are conflicting messages coming out from the review that our friends over the border have commissioned.

Potentially lower fees – but not for all subjects;

Too many people going to university – or is too few;

Grants for some perhaps – but not part-time students;

No entry below a D – but then again perhaps not;

You know, it so unlike this Tory Government to be in such a muddle and unable to speak with one voice....!

Seriously, I am proud that we as a sector in Wales have reached a consensus where we have the fairest, most progressive and sustainable system in the UK.

Our priorities continue to be ensuring that our students have access to support that enables them to meet their day to day living costs, that our institutions have access to a sustainable level of funding, and to make sure that support extends to part-time and postgraduate students.

I have, however, made it clear in my discussions with UK Government that it is important we are given the opportunity to understand the impact that the review will have in Wales, for Welsh institutions and students, in advance of any announcements. I have received some reassurance that there

will be a process of consultation and managed change, with a clear acknowledgement that institutions need time to plan.

I am pleased to see a scoping study on staff development in the FE sector has begun. Our aim must be to enable staff to develop their ability to the best they can achieve. The learner is the winner. I look forward to hearing the recommendations in due course.

And by continuing our work with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and other partners we can support Cymraeg 2050 – our plan for 1 million Welsh speakers.

....by enhancing skills provision, vocational courses, promoting Welsh-medium courses and teacher recruitment and retention.

....and by encouraging those with some ability to speak Welsh to further develop their skills to teach through the medium of Welsh.

We are committed to exploring a new ‘Welsh right’ to life-long learning, investing in the skills which people need throughout their lives, bringing individual, social and economic benefit.

We will maintain our commitment to apprenticeships, including higher level apprenticeships, across key sectors such as creative, digital and engineering.

But, the further roll out of HE in FE and the increase in higher apprenticeships, requires a culture shift; a move from the idea that universities are the only appropriate place to deliver HE, by encouraging increased collaboration between universities, Further Education colleges and industry.

Work on presenting the overarching vision for post-compulsory education and training continues.

The wider tertiary education sector faces considerable challenges over the next decade and I would like to work with

you, the funding council and others to help prepare institutions in Wales to meet these challenges.

I am convinced this is more than an issue of funding ... it is also about the offer for students, employers and the communities of Wales.

I remain committed to bringing forward legislation during the current Assembly term to establish a new 'Commission for Tertiary Education and Research'.

An implementation programme has been established to progress the legislation required to enact the new Commission and, subject of course to legislation, to establish the Commission by around 2023.

Engagement with key stakeholders will be essential throughout the legislation and implementation phases and an engagement plan is currently in development.

As things progress we will engage with UCU, with universities and colleges in Wales and other key stakeholders.

I would like to thank you for your support for the proposals and for your engagement during the consultation phases. This spirit of co-operation is vital as these reforms move forward.

Our funding reforms will ensure the money available to us for post-16 education in Wales has the impact it needs to support all learners, regardless of their age to thrive in our economy and communities in Wales.

But reformation, like education, is a journey, not a destination.

These are exciting times to be part of the collective effort to reform education in Wales. Together, we are delivering the most ambitious education reforms anywhere in the world.

You have a crucial role in working with us to deliver on this agenda.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.

Diolch yn fawr.