



**WALES
CYMRU**

**RESPONSE TO:
Consultation: Welsh Government
Draft Budget 2020-21**

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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. It 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.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committees of the National Assembly call for information to inform their scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s Draft Budget Proposals for 2020-2021.

UCU Wales shares the concerns expressed by the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd – Rebecca Evans AM – about the true implications of the UK Westminster Government’s one year Spending Round announced on 4th September 2019. We would agree that while there will be an increase in revenue and capital funding the Welsh Government’s budget for the forthcoming year will still be 2% lower in real terms than in 2010-2011¹. Austerity has had and will continue to have a devastating effect upon people and communities throughout Wales and constrains the ability of Welsh Government (WG) to achieve its mission of delivering Prosperity for All² and to fulfil the requirements of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (2015)³. These difficulties are compounded by the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the refusal of the Westminster Government to provide details of the EU replacement shared prosperity fund or give assurances that Wales will receive the same amount of funding as would have been that expected had the UK remained within the EU. Indeed, Brexit would mean a greater need for building home grown skills which would place greater demands on Welsh Government for funding. The current situation, with its short term approach, makes it difficult to make concrete, long-term sustainable plans and we understand the rationale for bringing forward the publication of the budget.

Notwithstanding the difficulties we face here in Wales, UCU is committed to representing the views and experiences of its members and to seek to address current issues and shortcomings that currently exist within the post sixteen education sector in Wales. Welsh Government has the scope to determine where to spend its budget and

¹ https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/1579836/WFA-Spending-Round-2019-Briefing.pdf

² <https://gweddill.gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

³ <https://gweddill.gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>

the increase in the block grant next year will provide an opportunity for WG to increase funding for more of its priorities than has been the case over the last decade. UCU calls upon WG to make tertiary education a key priority area for spending in the 2020-2021 budget.

In recent years tertiary education has suffered significant funding cuts being hit particularly badly by austerity. Public funding for UK tertiary education lags behind the OECD average, tuition fees for higher education are high, and students in further education also increasingly have to shoulder large debts in order to fund their studies. Falling education budgets have led to staff cuts and redundancies, rising workloads, pay reductions, threats to pensions and widespread use of insecure employment contracts in education.

UCU Wales urges WG to increase public investment in tertiary education, as well as fair pay and decent working conditions, so that the sector can provide a high quality education service to the people of Wales. Education is a public good that should be publicly funded, and cost should never be a barrier to participation. UCU believes that we need a more sustainable approach to building the education workforce of the future and better protection for employment rights. Further and higher education is vital for individual development, creating a more equal society and a successful economy. Colleges and universities are key economic contributors, both as local employers and as providers of training and education for the workforce. To realise its full potential to society, education and training must be adequately funded and fully accessible.

While we recognise the need for a long term holistic approach to solve the above concerns regarding funding and development for tertiary education, given the immediate requirement to plan for the forthcoming year, the following are our immediate priorities as contained within our current strategy. This in no way detracts from our commitment to working towards longer term substantive solutions to the concerns facing tertiary education.

1. Further Education:

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act – concerns have been expressed by those working in the sector about the resource implications of implementing this Act with one institution estimating the cost of securing a suitable staffing infrastructure being in excess of £1 million⁴ annually. Without additional funding we are concerned about the ability of the sector to properly meet the requirements contained within the Act.

⁴ Cross Party Group Briefing on Delivering Inclusive Further Education, 21 st May , 2019.

2. Higher Education:

Casualisation of staff is a significant issue of concern. Recent research that we have undertaken warns that the widespread use of casual contracts is damaging the quality of research and the education students receive⁵. Over two-thirds of respondents (71%) said they believed their mental health had been damaged by working on insecure contracts and more than two-fifths (43%) said it had impacted on their physical health. As well as the impact upon staff casualisation impacts negatively on the reputation and productivity of HE institutions and will impede their ability to achieve the aims and objectives contained within the recently published 'Research and Innovation: The Vision for Wales'⁶ (Note: the Diamond Review funding could assist in covering the cost of meeting this requirement). The funding discrepancies between Wales and England have been widely⁷ reported and a programme of action to address this is needed.

3. Adult (Community) Education:

Welsh Government recognises the invaluable contribution that **Adult (Community) Education** makes to Wales⁸ providing opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills, achieve qualifications, progress onto further learning pathways, or directly into employment or volunteering as well as contributing to health and wellbeing, social inclusion, community cohesion and addressing poverty. However Adult (Community) Education has been decimated by austerity and it is imperative that in addition to the policy statements about its positive effect additional funding is invested into this vitally important service.

⁵ University and College Union (2019). Counting the cost of casualisation in Higher Education. London: UCU

⁶ https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy_areas/research/research.aspx

⁷ https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eua%20pfo%202018%20report_14%20march%202019_final.pdf

⁸ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-08/adult-learning-in-wales.pdf>