

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

**2021**



# **UCU Wales Manifesto Welsh Parliament Elections**

**The Covid-19 crisis poses a double challenge. Beyond the public health emergency, the immediate response has been an unprecedented economic shutdown. When the medical emergency passes, the challenge will be to restart a severely stressed economy, with the risk being that the inequalities of wealth, power and opportunity we struggled with beforehand have been newly amplified.**

Wales requires a recovery and reform process in which the value of education and the needs of the community and planet come before marketization. A nation in which the learner's lifelong needs are addressed as a valuable right. New social partnership must be forged. Parity of esteem can be achieved as outdated distinctions between vocational and academic pathways give way to world-class methods that place pedagogy at their very centre.

Securing the future of further, higher and adult community education will be central to this equality led recovery. Learning benefits people of all ages in terms of employability, wellbeing, personal development and self-confidence. Now, more than ever, UCU campaigns for greater public investment in the post-16 education sector, as well as fair pay and decent working conditions for our members. Colleges and universities are key economic contributors, both as local employers, anchor institutions and as providers of training and education for the workforce on which local and Welsh economies depend.

Post-16 education is central to the success of the Welsh economy, but it also sits at the heart of social justice. Our world is changing fast; beyond the immediate crisis, people are living longer and facing the effects of globalisation, digital technology and climate change. They must be enabled to return to learning throughout their lives to help them adapt and thrive. If our post-16 education system is to fulfil its potential for the next decade and beyond, we need to ensure that high-quality learning opportunities are accessible for all – regardless of age, background or circumstance. We also need to ensure that careers in higher, further, adult and prison education are sustainable and attractive. To realise its full potential to society,

education and training must be adequately funded and fully accessible. Policies should be based on the premise that schools, further education providers, adult community learning and universities collectively provide the route to life enhancing opportunities and to stronger economies.

A reset is required. Skills are important but a transitional economy also requires the competencies, capabilities and habits of mind which can only be delivered through focus on pedagogy and collaborative quality enhancement. Professionals must be freed to develop world-class practise. We need to return the balance of education to one in which all sectors are viewed as a coherent part of the same process, and that the process is for the benefit and wellbeing of society as a whole. Our vision is for excellence in teaching, research and scholarship, the promotion of social justice through access for all to good-quality education within institutions and to placing a commitment to equality at the heart of our education system. We believe in the liberation of potential through education and training, working in social partnership to build future post-16 policy. Education must have a value in its own right. Its role in creating wealth is vital, but that must not be its sole purpose. At its very best, education is a liberator of minds, the provider of life chances and pioneer of new ideas and new knowledge.

But the process of change must be built on a genuine social partnership. Without that partnership the improvements to which we are all committed cannot be delivered. This manifesto is also underpinned by a commitment to quality. A new definition is needed which reaches beyond statistics on a spreadsheet to a wider recognition of the personal and collective advancement that education brings, the practical, everyday experiences of both learners and staff, and the immense contribution it can bring to the fight for social justice, social cohesion and ending child poverty. UCU has identified four areas where we would like to see firm commitments from all political parties in the forthcoming Welsh Parliament elections, which we believe will start to address these issues.

# Pledge One



## WORKLOAD OF STAFF IN THE POST-16 SECTOR

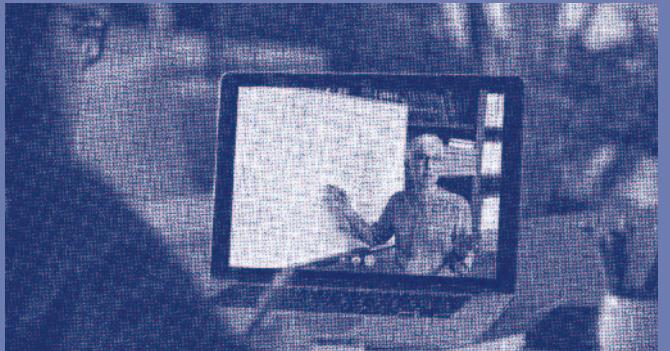
The current post-16 sector operates on a significant amount of good will. Long before the pandemic, professionals frequently worked above and beyond their contracted hours while employer workload models regularly under-reported the time spent working by staff. What was unsustainable in the past becomes inexcusable in the present. Since 2021 lecturers have rushed to adapt their practice to new blended learning techniques, skilled-up in the area of digital technology and gone the extra mile both in terms of offering pastoral support and ensuring a safe learning environment. UCU accepts that economic recovery will require flexibility and innovation. However, we will rigorously reject any model which funds delivery through staff's unpaid work.

Tasks should have a clearly evidenced purpose and managerialism must be addressed to make more time for learning and teaching. The profession is eager to collaborate around a genuine learning revolution but good faith must be recognised with fair workload and a focus on wellbeing. **We call on all parties to commit to:**

**undertake a serious review of workload in all post 16 institutions in Wales, ensuring that workload models allow for the flexibility needed to respond to future demands which we know will be placed on the sector in relation to skills development and life-long learning and a well-trained flexible workforce who develop transferable skills throughout their working lives.**



# Pledge Two



## COVID 19 – MAKING GOOD OUT OF BAD

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an almost unimaginable impact across all UK nations. For the higher education sector in Wales, the pandemic continues to threaten immense financial consequences. Welsh universities have already suffered very significant revenue losses in respect of accommodation, conferences, and events activity. Optimistically, assuming that a vaccine is available in early 2021, it is still possible that institutions will require stabilisation in the short to medium term.

The response to Covid 19 has also seen unprecedented workforce collaboration. Acknowledging that much of the knowledge and expertise sit with our members, the necessity of adapting new techniques around digital and blended learning will require space and investment.

As physical distance is replaced with digital proximity, Wales is presented with opportunities to lead on innovation. Moreover, doing so will become all the more crucial as our economy changes in response to Brexit and accelerated automation. Institutions can be at the forefront of this revolution if staff are afforded the room to develop their own practise through collaboration and excellent continuing professional development. **We are calling for all parties to commit to:**

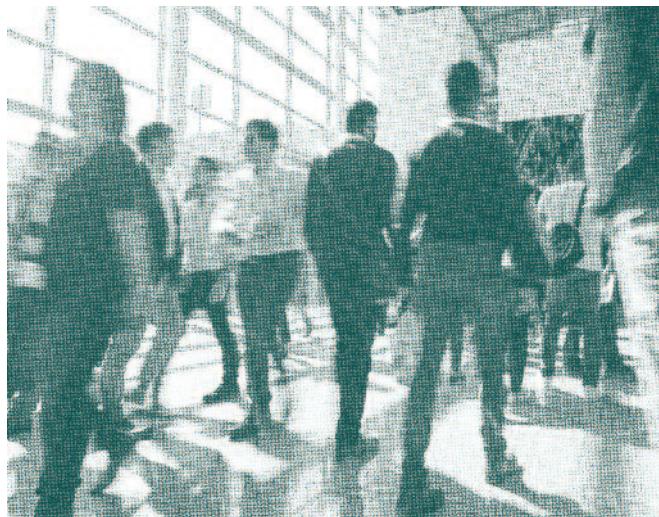
**Work with the university sector to safeguard the ongoing financial health of institutions and ensure that digital 2030 is properly funded and that professionals are supported in delivery and genuine quality enhancement.**



# Pledge Three



## ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING



UCU believes that adult community learning (ACL) can make a decisive contribution to the coordinated programme of re-skilling and retraining which a post Covid wales will demand. We can no longer depend upon localised centres of prosperity to pull-up surrounding communities. There is now general recognition that place based and accessible provision provides by far the best way of meeting the needs of underrepresented groups who would otherwise be left behind. Consequently, Adult Community Learning is crucial to achieving a more prosperous Wales and equality led recovery.

However, in recent years ACL has suffered significant cutbacks beneath the impact of austerity. Provision has

contracted across Wales and has been severely eroded in some areas. UCU Wales is committed to ensuring that ACL is properly and adequately funded and that the planning and delivery issues are overcome in order to secure fair and equitable provision of ACL throughout Wales. Adult community learning can make real differences to people's lives by providing a platform for progression into further learning, training, community engagement and employment. With a renewed focus on vision and strategy, structures, partnerships and quality ACL can continue play a lead role in supporting individuals and communities across Wales in order to secure Prosperity for All. Taking into account the continued low levels of essential skills and high rates of economic inactivity in many parts of the country, something must be done.

**We are calling for all parties to commit to:**

**Develop effective adult community learning provision that engages with the hardest to reach groups; levelling the playing field for all parts of post 16 provision, helping to change attitudes to learning and offering people a second chance to maximise their potential. ACL provision is a human right for ALL people and communities in Wales to access and complete regardless of their circumstances or position in Welsh society securing ACL as being a core component of the Welsh right to lifelong learning.**

# Pledge Four



## A WELSH APPRENTICESHIP FRAMEWORK

Prior to the crisis, UCU had already been lobbying to obtain a coherent apprenticeship framework for Wales, which would allow learners to move from a junior apprenticeship at the age of 14 through to a master apprenticeship at level seven. The introduction of the new curriculum in schools looks to the 21st century to ensure that school leavers are properly prepared for structural changes to work - with the increased use of digital technology and the changes in the production processes in manufacturing. The current government's health and wellbeing goals are key drivers in this space. We must ensure that we have an apprenticeship framework which meets the needs of the individual and the employers in Wales, many of whom are SMEs. Responding to 'Public Good - Prosperous Wales', Lucas<sup>1</sup> argued on behalf of UCU for a framework which addressed the key issues as he saw them.

*Notwithstanding the very contemporary ambition of more joined-up provision, the language of the Consultation is strangely backward looking and pays little attention to developments across the world. It is littered with references to skills, has just seven mentions of the word knowledge and no acknowledgement of broader concepts such as competencies, capabilities or habits of mind. If four sectors - schools, FE, work based learning and HE are to be dealt with holistically then it will be important to find a common language.*

Not only is a common language needed, but a common apprenticeship framework, which allows workers to pick up learning at appropriate points in their development; which coheres in terms of competencies, capabilities and habits of mind, is flexible and set within a credit and accumulation framework to allow part-time access at every level post junior apprenticeship. If Wales created a framework which met international vocational standards, it could lead the way in this field, especially in engaging SMEs to allow their workforce access to part-time apprenticeships. In effect what we are suggesting is that the apprenticeship becomes the qualification at the level achieved thus far, the important phrase there being 'thus far.' **We are calling for all parties to commit to:**

**Work in social partnership to commission a project which scopes the possibility of introducing a Welsh apprenticeship framework across schools, FE and HE institutions. We propose seeking advice from the OECD and Professor Bill Lucas on how we could develop a framework which would be flexible and accessible to part time learning whilst also aligning with the changes to the new curriculum introduced as a result of the work of Professor Donaldson.**

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10750/Public-good/pdf/public-good-prosperous-wales\\_bill-lucas\\_8Nov17.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10750/Public-good/pdf/public-good-prosperous-wales_bill-lucas_8Nov17.pdf)