

UCU'S vision for a new post-1992 University for South East Wales

Introduction

UCU Wales and the UCU Wales Branches representing Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of Glamorgan and University of Wales Newport would like to outline their collective vision for the proposed new metropolitan university in South East Wales. Whilst talks have begun between two institutions in the region, we strongly believe that the three post-92 institutions in the region must come together to form a new university for South East Wales.

UCU believes that the establishment of a single Higher Education Institution in South East Wales provides an ideal opportunity to create a university that delivers high quality education, applied research and career and professional development whilst also contributing to the wider social, economic and cultural policy agenda of the Welsh Government.

However, UCU Wales' support for such a single institution in South East Wales is on the basis that a genuinely 'new' university be established. UCU Wales understands that it may be necessary for one of the existing Institutions in South East Wales (Cardiff Metropolitan, University of Glamorgan or University of Wales Newport) to act as the legal vehicle to create such a new university. Nonetheless, such use should be strictly limited to this purpose and that, subsequently, a new university be created with a new corporate identity. UCU Wales further envisages that such a new university would incorporate and enhance the existing strengths and specialisms of the three existing institutions.

Furthermore, UCU considers this a real opportunity to build a new university that has a form of governance better suited to the demands of a 21st Century, where it is already well established that nimbleness and agility in relation to the dynamic and highly changeable recruitment and research environment are essential. Consequently, it is paramount that a form of governance is developed that is dependent on the representation of students and particularly academic staff whose expertise in relation to meeting the needs of students and in curriculum development is crucial.

A new approach for a new university

To this end UCU Wales considers that a stylised version of the Higher Education Institutional design found in Baden Württemberg, Southern Germany might be an appropriate model on which to base the creation of a single post-1992 Higher Education Institution in South East Wales. Such an approach, UCU Wales believes, would support the advice and recommendations provided by HEFCW to the Minister in the review 'A Future

Structure of Universities in Wales', 29 June 2011, which outlines one 'research intensive' university and a 'metropolitan' university for South East Wales. This recommendation, UCU Wales considers, is broadly compatible with the Duale Hochschule model used in Baden Württemberg.

In following the model referred to above, Cardiff University would remain the 'research led' Institution for the region with the new university forming the metropolitan university with an applied/vocational "mission". Thus the purpose of the new university would be to provide high quality learning and teaching, a broad portfolio and breadth of academic provision, applied research and third mission activities that would complement the activities of both Cardiff University and the Open University in South East Wales.

This institution UCU Wales argues needs to be flexible in its approach to developing a variety of high quality programmes, not simply more of the same. In particular the work based learning programmes offered need to concentrate on "product" not "process" especially at the bachelor level. This will require the active participation of employers. Once again the Duale Hochschule Baden Württemberg is an excellent exemplar, providing a skilled workforce for one of the most efficient regional economies in Europe. Furthermore, the new university would be considered, first and foremost, as a 'university' and not merely a business operating for profit – although this does not preclude the new university taking a businesslike approach in some of its activities – and, moreover, it should be constituted as such, in terms of its vision, mission and governance structures which should include representatives from all stakeholder groups.

Building on current collaboration

The new university would build upon and enhance current collaborative projects established in South East Wales, such as;

- Initial Teacher Education and Training,
- Wales Institute for Research in Art and Design,
- University Heads of the Valley,

and would be based on a spatially distributed model with three main hubs in Pontypridd and the Valleys, Cardiff and Newport. Each hub could individually serve the higher educational needs of the community in which it is based while collectively the hubs would serve the needs of the South East Wales region and beyond. In this model there would be no necessary requirement for staff or students to be mobile between campuses – although this isn't precluded - and establishing the new university around the three existing geographical bases should lead to a more effective use of the existing estates and infrastructure, offer opportunities for economies of scale and scope in its core activities, remove any nugatory competition and thus better serve the needs of the hubs, the region and Wales.

A better approach to learning and teaching

In regards to the learning and teaching mission, this would be involve an “all through” approach for the University, with a focus on lifelong learning, capable of accommodating any starting point for student learning in higher education.

As an indicative example, the new university could offer the scope and scale to encompass the presently excellent but atomised provision of Art and Design in South East Wales within the remit of a single institution that would further develop the existing strengths of art and design provision and enhance the culture, life and identity of Wales in creative arts provision. This would provide world class opportunities and facilities for students, staff and the community. Moreover, extending this further to the performing arts, in respect of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) and its unique and specialist provision, UCU Wales suggests a similar arrangement between it and the new Institution as that currently existing with the University of Glamorgan. However, the new Institution would seek to enhance the ‘reach’ of the excellence provided by the RWCMD by seeking to address the issues raised by successive Welsh Governments concerning widening access and progression of under-represented groups.

A significant player on the global stage

The new university, once created, would also be a significant player in the UK Higher Education sector, attracting students from England as a result of its high quality vocational and work-based teaching, learning and applied research. Also, unlike the existing institutions, which deliver on Welsh Government priorities in accordance with their respective (and sometimes restrictive) business plans, the new Institution if properly constituted in terms of its vision, mission and governance would have Welsh Government priorities embedded in its core activities. Also, as well as continuing to provide and enhance existing quality provision, the new Institution would actively expand provision and identify gaps in Higher Education provision in South East Wales. It would further ensure that identifiable, but currently marginal fields/disciplines are nurtured and developed through academic development and support rather than being ‘crowded out’ by larger more profitable subject areas (such as Business Studies - Humanities hybrids) as can be the case currently.

It is UCU Wales’ view that if the new university is developed along the lines outlined above it should be capable of delivering enhanced benefits to students and other stakeholders in the South East Wales region. With the necessary resources, increased opportunity and quality of provision available at all of the campus hubs, the vocational pathway that the new university would provide through high quality teaching and applied research would facilitate better economic engagement and employability for graduates.

In short as it develops and grows the new university should aspire to be a recognised prestigious University of its type.

Governance

As UCU Wales mentions previously, this is the key issue in achieving the vision, mission and type of post-1992 university needed for South East Wales in the twenty-first century. If the new university is to effectively serve the region and all its stakeholders, then the composition of the governing body has to accommodate representatives of those stakeholder groups and not just the business community – which is the current dominant model.

Furthermore, the governing body must reflect an appropriate gender balance and address issues of equality on its governing body through its Strategic Equality Objectives. The focus of the decision-making should be, first and foremost, based on academic values rather than the current focus on managerialism and cost base. In other words, management and resourcing constraints and decisions should be accommodating to the academic mission of the university as an educational establishment.

Such an approach, UCU Wales considers, would be flexible enough to ensure that academic programmes of value are maintained and supported. To this end therefore, UCU Wales considers it particularly necessary to encourage the participation of the academic and student communities in the new university's design, structure, decision making processes and continuing development.

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For further information, please contact Bethan Thomas, Wales Support Official on bridgend@ucu.org.uk or 01656 721951.