
UNISON Cymru Wales – headline response to the Senedd CYPE committee on the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill

1. UNISON is broadly supportive of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill.
2. UNISON would like to seek further clarity on the governance arrangements and the level of control Welsh Government will have over the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.
3. It is important to consider this in the wider context of social partnership, and within the legislative framework of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill. The higher education sector in Wales has had an ad hoc approach to participation and engagement in the social partnership mechanisms. UNISON has consistently raised concerns about this and we have concerns about how this will translate in a new Commission that is bringing together the whole post-16 education sector.
4. There is a need to ensure equity across the sector for funding allocations. Whilst UNISON is supportive of bringing together the tertiary education sector, there will undoubtedly be challenges in overcoming the long-term and deeply rooted perceptions that favour higher education.
5. UNISON believes that the contentious and challenging nature of the policy debate around Higher Education funding partially rests upon the fact that the 'royal route' to Higher Education continues to benefit and reinforces the privileges of the most affluent in society. Addressing the social inequalities which play out within the education system as a whole and which then goes on to shape people's life chances and opportunities within the labour market is an essential part of building

a consensus around a fair and sustainable way of funding higher education.

6. By comparison, the further education sector has been neglected and underfunded. UNISON believes that our education system has been hampered by a class-based dichotomy between education for a career and training for a job. Despite generations of discussion on the need for parity of esteem for all models of learning, the divide remains as wide as ever. There is a fundamental need for all parts of the education sector to function coherently with shared concepts of knowledge, skill, and achievement.
7. UNISON agrees that the establishment of the Tertiary Education Commission will go some way to overcome these concerns, the establishment of the commission will not be enough and must be addressed proactively.
8. There is a need to recognise the differing structures across the tertiary education sector. The higher education sector has an all-Wales pay and grading system. Further education is moving slowly towards this same approach, but currently struggles with recruitment and retention because of inferior pay, terms, and conditions. In essence, if the sector is to function as one, a two-tier workforce must be guarded against.
9. Furthermore, sixth form colleges are allied to local government and so is another, differing structure that needs to be considered.
10. The commission and the benefits of unifying the tertiary education sector cannot be saved for the academics and professionals alone. Education and business support staff are integral to the tertiary education sector and must be valued as such. All staff should be directly employed within the sector and paid accordingly. All staff should be paid at least the foundation living wage.
11. Other types of adult education need to be fully considered – including workplace training and learning which gives many opportunities for developing core skills, confidence, and career

progression for all staff, but particularly those on lower pay. As we move towards carbon net-zero it is essential that we prioritise a just transition, and tertiary education will form a key part of that.