



# BUILDING WALES' FUTURE

UNIVERSITIES WALES MANIFESTO  
FOR THE 2021 SENEDD ELECTIONS

# UNIVERSITIES ARE CHANGING.

IN A WORLD EXPERIENCING RAPID  
CHANGE, OUR UNIVERSITIES HAVE  
NOT STOOD STILL

# OVER THIS SENEDD TERM, WALES HAS FACED UP TO THE CHALLENGES POSED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, GLOBAL VOLATILITY, NEW TRADING RELATIONSHIPS AND, OF COURSE, THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

Universities have responded to these challenges over the past five years in the only way they know how: by adapting, working together, delivering skills to more people of all ages and backgrounds, and carrying out world-leading research and innovation.

The universities' Civic Mission Network is helping develop and strengthen universities' work for communities across Wales. Every university is now an accredited Living Wage Foundation employer. Our universities are developing new and better ways of delivering skills to people across the country through schemes such as degree apprenticeships. We are developing new ways to collaborate on research and innovation

projects. Internationally, we continue to build on partnerships and projects around the world, promoting Wales as an open and welcoming destination for students and researchers alike.

Nothing better reflects the speed and resilience with which our universities can respond to the challenges we face than the response to the crises presented by Covid-19: from new online learning, to the delivery of pastoral care for students; from PPE manufacturing, to researching treatments for the disease. All the while, many students and staff across Wales volunteered to be on the frontline, both in healthcare and in our communities.

## OUR AMBITIONS FOR WALES

The future remains uncertain as the country emerges from the pandemic and enters a new era with changing global trading relationships. The climate change emergency is likely to become a more urgent threat to our way of life. The workplace is changing. Digitalisation and automation will bring new social and economic tests and opportunities. Together, the scale of these challenges is unparalleled.

By working with the next Senedd and Welsh Government, universities can be at the centre of a national recovery. Our universities can help to build Wales' future by delivering upon Wales' ambitions and promise.

Welsh universities are well-placed to support the delivery of an ambitious vision for Wales that includes:

› Building Wales' regions

› A future-ready workforce

› A sustainable, green Wales

› Wales' digital future

› A globally competitive and outward-looking nation

› Advancing our culture

## HOW A FUTURE GOVERNMENT CAN HELP US DELIVER

### Stable and sustainable funding through fees and grants

For our universities to deliver on our ambitions for Wales, stable and sustainable funding will be essential. As demand for different kinds of higher education increases, including part-time learning, so too will the need for greater capacity for our universities to deliver.

**1.**

Providing stable and sustainable funding for universities

**2.**

Supporting student mental health and well-being by mainstreaming the funding that universities and students' unions received during the Coronavirus pandemic

### Research and innovation

Research and innovation are key drivers of productivity, generating jobs across Wales. Funding such as quality-related research funding and innovation funding play a crucial role in enabling Welsh universities to secure funding from outside Wales, delivering further economic benefit.

We are asking parties to commit to:

**3.**

Establishing a Deputy Minister for Research and Innovation, to work with universities and capitalise on the immediate opportunities to drive economic growth

**4.**

Implementing the Reid review, committing to real-terms increases in quality-related research funding, increases to innovation funding, and incentivising institutions to win investment from outside Wales

### Skills and developing talent

Addressing Wales' skills shortage and changing workplace is critical if we are to ensure a future of prosperity and growth, where society is civically engaged, responsible and healthy.

We are asking parties to commit to:

**5.**

Developing an ambitious Universities for Skills programme which supports innovation, collaboration, scaling up activity and further develops systems of flexible learning

**6.**

Expanding the degree apprenticeship offer to cover a wider range of subjects and include master's level

### International

In the highly volatile and new international landscape following the pandemic, universities' international agendas will be an important part of the recovery, key to realising a globally competitive and outward-looking nation.

We are asking parties to commit to:

**7.**

Securing Wales' global presence in a highly volatile and new international landscape by investing in university networks and programmes

**8.**

Being ambitious in delivering an international strategy for Wales by setting a target to increase university exports by 75% to £950 million by 2030

# BUILDING WALES' FUTURE

UNIVERSITIES ARE CHANGING...



## BUILDING WALES' FUTURE

Elections provide us with a structure to reflect on what has come before and how it has shaped where we are. In Wales, we speak of what happened in the first Assembly, or the second Assembly, or the third. As we come to the end of another Senedd term, it brings into focus the challenges and uncertainty that have characterised the past five years.

Climate change, a changing workplace, demographic change, global volatility, changes to our trading relationships, and looming large over all of this, the Coronavirus pandemic. The all too human temptation is to focus on these challenges and difficulties but not the ways in which we have risen to the challenge and tackled those difficulties head on.

Universities in Wales have been around a long time but, like any long-standing institution, they have not stood still. Throughout the tumultuous twentieth century our universities adapted and changed. They provided skills and education to greater numbers of people from more diverse backgrounds. They led the way on scientific breakthroughs that have both shaped our understanding of the world and how we live in it.

### **Our universities continue to change.**

In the past five years our universities have brought a renewed vigour to the ways in which they benefit people and places in Wales. We have seen greater teaching and research links built with primary and secondary schools. As a sector we have come together to form the Civic Mission Network which provides a vehicle to promote and share best practice on universities' civic mission work. We are developing a Civic Mission Framework for Wales that provides a clear structure to support the development and furthering of universities' work to benefit the people and places of Wales.

And we are in a unique position among the UK nations with every university in Wales being an accredited living wage employer.

We are driving forward new ways to facilitate and promote collaboration in research and innovation. We know that research and innovation in Wales is

excellent, but there is a need for greater scale to bring additional investment to Wales. We think that working together will help to deliver this.

Universities have developed new ways of delivering higher-level skills to people of all ages and backgrounds. We have seen record-breaking growth in part-time and postgraduate study. We have also introduced degree apprenticeships in Wales and are working with employers to identify where there is demand for expansion of these programmes into different industries.

Universities are striving to deliver more for Wales. Our universities generate £500 million in export earnings and host students from 140 countries. Our work with partners through the Global Wales programme is now internationally recognised. Our work with Vietnamese universities to support the Vietnam Government's higher education reform agenda has delivered significant changes to university governance in Vietnam and consolidated our reputation as a key partner.

Our partnerships with prestigious scholarship schemes such as Fulbright and Chevening, as well as the launch of our own Global Wales Scholarships, attract talent to Wales. These initiatives promote Wales as an open, welcoming and attractive destination for students and researchers alike.

Nothing better reflects the speed and resilience with which universities can respond to the challenges we face than the way institutions responded to the immense challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic. When the pandemic hit, universities switched to online delivery, supported students in returning to their home addresses, and continued to teach and award programmes.

At the same time, universities stepped up to support the national effort. From manufacturing PPE to researching the virus and how best to treat and tackle it. From providing training and courses to supporting local communities through volunteering. Many of our staff and students volunteered to be on the frontline.

## OUR AMBITIONS FOR WALES

The next Welsh Government will face some of the most complex challenges of recent history. At the time of writing we do not know what our exit from the EU will mean for trade or our participation in EU programmes. The urgency with which we must tackle climate change will only increase.

At the same time Wales is undergoing significant demographic change. We have an ageing population, and one that is overall older and less well qualified than the UK as a whole. It is expected that the pandemic will accelerate the workplace change that was already taking place globally. Even where estimates suggest the number of jobs created will outnumber those displaced, there is no guarantee those jobs will be created in Wales.

But there is much to be optimistic about, despite those issues we face. As well as the incredible work supporting the national effort against Covid-19, universities continue to drive innovation and create opportunities for people in Wales. Our graduates are some of the most entrepreneurial, outperforming counterparts elsewhere in the UK.

Our universities attract students and academics from around the world, bringing with them new visitors to Wales' wealth of natural riches and historic landmarks.

Despite the uncertainty on the horizon, we are building collaborative, dynamic and resilient universities with a diverse population of students and staff, ready to withstand whatever changes are ahead.

### Building Wales' regions

Welsh universities are critical economic anchors in all parts of Wales that support the foundational economy. All universities in Wales are accredited living wage employers and signed up to the Code of Practice on Ethical Employment in Supply Chains. Wales continues to lead the UK with the highest rate of graduate start-ups per capita.

We are uniquely placed to be able to further support parties' priorities on building Wales' regions. Universities have resources to deliver direct benefit through funding while also acting as conduits for other organisations and business – which might have smaller administrative capacity – to access regional investment opportunities. Our work generating graduate start-ups feeds into regional economies and supports employment objectives.

Beyond that, universities have also demonstrated an ability to leverage regional funding to secure additional investment to Wales.

### A future-ready workforce

The workplace is changing, and there are risks and opportunities for Wales in this change. We are seeing an increasing demand for higher-level skills at the same time as automation and technological change risk shrinking the occupation sectors upon which Wales depends. This, combined with Wales' demographics, means we will need to support more people of all ages and backgrounds to upskill and retrain.

In the next Senedd term universities will be able to support employment in key ways:

- through providing joined-up flexible learning, including part-time provision
- by delivering research and innovation activity that will generate new businesses, new jobs and new industries. This will include knowledge transfer partnerships that help existing businesses to expand
- by supporting the generation of new businesses, including graduate start-ups where Wales is already UK-leading
- through universities' local economic activity, including the contribution to the foundation economy and the spending of staff, students and visitors

## **A globally competitive and outward-looking nation**

Universities are responsible for around £500 million of export earnings in Wales: around 4% of all Welsh exports. But the contribution universities make is wider than direct economic benefit.

Through alumni, staff and student mobility, collaborative research, cultural and sporting activities our universities are contributing to Wales' soft power.

Partnerships built by our universities through transnational education, research and commercial activities have established a significant footprint for Wales internationally, building on the international recognition of Wales as an innovative and forward-thinking nation. Similarly, by coming to Wales, international students, staff and researchers play an invaluable role in diversifying and internationalising our communities.

## **A sustainable, green Wales**

Welsh universities are genuinely at the forefront of developing and implementing solutions to the challenges posed by climate change.

This includes research and innovation that directly addresses how we as a society transition to a low carbon future, as well as the practical challenges around generating and storing energy. Many of these projects are collaborative and examine complex and interdependent issues.

As well as research and innovation on low carbon and energy, universities are also well-placed to deliver on sustainable use of resources and land/seascapes.

Research and innovation is only part of the picture. As we introduce new technologies – such as those that will create and proliferate energy-neutral or energy-positive homes – we will also need to retrain and upskill those who will be fitting, installing and making use of

these technologies. There will be opportunities to further join up the skills system, allowing cutting edge research and innovation to inform delivery across the entire education system.

## **Wales' digital future**

Wales' response to digitalisation, and ensuring we make the most of the opportunities presented, will in large part depend on our ability to further upskill our population, and the success with which we deliver research and innovation in this area.

Universities are well-placed to deliver in these areas. The implementation of degree apprenticeships in digital has seen substantial and increasing demand from businesses across Wales. Our universities host high profile hubs and centres that cover cyber security, software engineering and data science.

Universities in Wales are building Wales' digital future. There is a need for funding and policy support for this fast-developing sector.

## **Advancing our culture**

Universities play an important role in the cultural life of Wales. As well as teaching and research in the arts and humanities, our universities are often cultural and artistic hubs offering live performances, exhibitions, and public lectures. Our universities undertake research in and about Wales and its culture.

Beyond that, universities often provide a community space, a place for people to gather and pursue shared activities.

As we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic, the rooted presence of universities in communities will provide opportunities to come together and share experience.

Our universities will also continue to be key to meeting ambitions around the Welsh language, both by providing Welsh-medium education and also, in many cases, delivering or hosting Welsh for Adults courses.

## **Our students and staff**

Students and staff are the heart of our universities, they were pivotal in the speed with which our universities adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic. They bring economic benefits to local areas. The research and innovation activity carried out by our staff and students generates new knowledge and new jobs; further, they are instrumental in developing ways in which our people can be equipped for new opportunities and realise economic and sustainable growth in Wales.

Welsh universities have led the UK on key areas of student experience and satisfaction, and over the next Senedd term, excellence in teaching and learning, as well as the important pastoral support that our institutions are known for, will continue to be a key priority. The use of new technologies prompted by the pandemic also present opportunities for Wales to be world-leading in delivering teaching and learning. This is already being capitalised on through Wales-wide collaborations on blended learning.

## **Working with the next Welsh Government**

The national response to the Coronavirus pandemic has been characterised by coproduction and collaboration between universities, governments and stakeholders. This collaborative approach is one that we can build upon moving into the next Senedd term. As we have set out earlier in this document, we face clear challenges and obstacles going into the next Senedd term. But we believe there are real opportunities for government, the Senedd and universities to work together to develop and implement solutions to tackle those challenges.

Universities have set out a clear direction of travel to this end in the recent Statement of Intent<sup>1</sup>. As we move into the next Senedd term, universities will continue to implement a change programme that will improve collaboration, delivering tangible benefits to the people and places of Wales.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/W20-27HE-Higher-Education-Investment-and-Recovery-Fund.pdf>

# HOW A FUTURE GOVERNMENT CAN HELP US DELIVER



## 1. STABLE AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING THROUGH FEES AND GRANTS

For our universities to deliver on our ambitions for Wales, stable and sustainable funding will be essential. As demand for different kinds of higher education, including part-time learning, increases so too will the need for greater capacity for our universities to deliver.

Our universities are a core part of Wales' national infrastructure. They play a crucial role in both the employment and wider economies of the regions in which they are based. Proportionally, universities are more important to the Welsh economy than the other nations of the UK.

Currently universities are funded through a combination of fees and grants, and the Diamond review recommendations, supported by universities and students, have been key in this regard.

**We would ask that parties commit to providing stable and sustainable funding for universities.**

**We are asking parties to support student mental health and well-being by mainstreaming the funding that universities and students' unions received during the Coronavirus pandemic.**



## 2. SKILLS AND DEVELOPING TALENT

Addressing Wales' skills shortage is critical if we are to ensure a future of prosperity and growth, one where people are civically engaged, responsible and healthy.

Universities have already committed to expanding the breadth and reach of our skills offer including part-time and lifelong learning, but there are ways in which a future Welsh Government can support the sector to further deliver for Wales.

Perhaps the most crucial part of doing so is ensuring stable and sustainable funding for universities. In addition to this:

**We are asking parties to commit to developing an ambitious Universities for Skills programme which supports innovation, collaboration, scaling up activity and further develops systems of flexible learning**

**We are asking parties to commit to expanding the degree apprenticeship offer to cover a wider range of subjects and include master's level.**



**3.**

### **RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

Research and innovation are key drivers of productivity. Through the work our universities do in this area new jobs are generated across Wales, and the application of this research supports businesses to be more agile and competitive.

The university landscape is shifting quickly. European Structural Funds, which have been particularly important in supporting research and innovation in Wales, will be coming to an end and there remains uncertainty over replacement funding. At the same time the amount of UK-wide competitive funding available is increasing.

Welsh universities are working to transform the ways in which we collaborate on research to ensure that we are as competitive as possible in securing competitive funding.

In his review of Welsh Government funded research and innovation, Professor Graeme Reid highlighted how funding streams such as quality-related research funding and innovation funding play a crucial role in the ability of Welsh universities to secure funding from outside Wales, bringing economic benefit and jobs to Wales.

**We are asking parties to commit to establishing a Deputy Minister for Research and Innovation, to work with universities and capitalise on the immediate opportunities to drive economic growth.**

**We are asking parties to commit to implementing the Reid review, committing to real-terms increases in quality-related research funding, increases in innovation funding, and incentivising institutions to win investment from outside Wales.**



**4.**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

In a highly volatile and new international landscape following the pandemic, we see universities' international agendas, and indeed the Global Wales programme, as being an important part of the recovery, key to realising a globally competitive and outward-looking nation.

**We are asking parties to commit to secure Wales' global presence in a highly volatile and new international landscape by investing in university networks and programmes**

**We are asking parties to commit to being ambitious in delivering an international strategy for Wales by setting a target to increase university exports by 75% to £950 million by 2030**

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