

Senedd
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN



13 May 2024

Dear Buffy Williams MS,

Re: ColegauCymru welcome letter and invitation to the Colleges Alliance meeting

Firstly, many congratulations on your election as the new Chair of the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee. We know you have been a dedicated member of the Committee over the years, and as a long-term friend of further education (FE) (you might recall meeting with us in 2022 and visiting the Coleg y Cymoedd campus), we are looking forward to continuing our positive working relationship in your new role as Chair.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight ColegauCymru's latest thinking on some key issues. ColegauCymru is an education charity which promotes the public benefit of FE in Wales. We believe that all learners should have the right to world-class education, delivered in a safe, diverse and inclusive setting and within a sector which supports the wider community, employers and the economy. As part of our representative role, we convene the FE Principals' Forum, as well as various other networks which represent FE colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development, and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales including operating mechanisms through which FE colleges negotiate with trade unions on pay and workforce matters. As you will be all too aware, we are navigating a turbulent time with acute pressure on public finances, multiple changes to the education infrastructure landscape and continuing to bear the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

From 1 August 2024, Wales will become the first country in the UK to pioneer a single overarching regulatory, oversight, and coordinating authority for all tertiary provision with the operational launch of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). This landmark piece of legislation introduces some of the most significant reforms to the architecture of our education system since devolution. The Welsh Government's Statement of Priorities rightly commits to putting learners at the heart of the system and we welcome the commitment to further strengthen parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes as well as the focus on clearer pathways for learners of all ages, including adult learners and apprentices. Whilst there is much to welcome, it is critical that CTER quickly gets to grip with the true scale of the challenge and the need for reform. In particular, CTER must work with the Welsh Government to ensure there is a clear 14-19 Learning and Transition Pathway for young people taking their first steps into post-16 education and a commitment to reviewing the sustainability and offer between 16-19, in particular the viability of small school sixth forms and the breadth of choice learners are able to access. ColegauCymru stands ready to support both Welsh Government and CTER as its strategic plan is developed over the coming months.

VCSEs

As part of their Qualified for the Future reforms, Qualifications Wales is reshaping the full qualifications offer which will be available to learners aged 14 to 16 alongside new Made-for-Wales GCSEs. ColegauCymru has engaged with Qualifications Wales on their VCSE proposals and we agree that there is a need for better options for all young people who are interested in studying vocational subjects. We will work with Qualifications Wales on the development of VCSEs to ensure that young people have the best possible options. It is essential that there is genuine parity between VCSEs and GCSEs and that young people who choose a vocational pathway are not disadvantaged. This must mean that VCSEs are taught by specialist staff and that there are partnerships with

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colleges to ensure pupils have access to high-quality, industry standard facilities. There must be a close monitoring of who is taking up VCSEs to ensure the changes are not creating a two-tier system and further embedding inequalities.

Vocational Education and Training Strategy for Wales

ColegauCymru continues to urge the Welsh Government to develop a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Strategy. For far too long, Wales has had no long-term plan for vocational education and training and the result has been a series of short-term and fragmented interventions. There is now a responsibility on Ministers to step forward and ensure a new strategic vision for the future is in place. This strategy was one of the primary recommendations from the Welsh Government's Vocational Qualifications Review last year. A strategy would offer us an opportunity to clearly articulate Wales' ambitions for what VET can deliver for Wales. Progress should be made as a matter of urgency so that we can identify the right priorities for the future. ColegauCymru, and colleges across Wales, are committed to working with Welsh Government and other stakeholders to ensure our vocational qualifications suit the needs of today as well as future generations.

Internationalisation

CollegesWales International supports the internationalisation of the FE sector in many ways: to enrich and enhance teaching and learning experiences; raise learners' aspirations and broaden their horizons; inform professional practice and improve provision and raise the profile of international work undertaken in FE. Through the Taith programme, ColegauCymru is currently undertaking two projects to inform policy and practice. The first is on Vocational Qualification Reform and the Implementation of CTER with a delegation of Principals and Welsh Government officials travelling to Helsinki in April 2024 to learn from international best practice. The focus was aimed at understanding what a national strategy for VET could look like for Wales, a strategy which must link VET to Wales' economic and industrial priorities. Secondly, ColegauCymru has secured Taith funding as part of our Memorandum of Understanding with Colleges and Institutes Canada, to establish a community of practice intended to tackle the issue of peer-on-peer sexual harassment in FE, highlighted by Estyn's report last year.

Welsh-medium education

ColegauCymru, and the wider FE sector, are supportive of the Welsh Government's target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and we work closely with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to support the delivery of Welsh medium and bilingual provision. In order to boost delivery through the Welsh language, all colleges in Wales have taken part in the Cymraeg Gwaith scheme. Supported by the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol co-ordinates the Cymraeg Gwaith programme on behalf of the FE sector. Cymraeg Gwaith aims to strengthen Welsh language skills in workplaces across Wales and has been operational in the FE sector since 2017. However, in order to continue delivering this successful programme, long term funding must be secured as this is crucial to ensuring the sector's contribution to Cymraeg 2050.

Towards an anti-racist Wales

The FE sector is showing real leadership in its journey towards anti-racism and supporting the Welsh Government's ambition of creating an anti-racist Wales by 2030. We are not complacent about the scale of the challenge or believe that strategies alone can prevent the experience of racism that learners and staff face. ColegauCymru, on behalf of our member colleges, is committed to supporting the Welsh Government in working towards an anti-racist Wales by 2030, and all colleges have local action plans in place.

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Active Wellbeing

Helping Wales to become healthier and more active is a priority, not only for Welsh Government, but also for the FE sector. Encouraging new approaches for young people and college staff to be more active and identifying clear links to better individual wellbeing provides a great start to tackling some of the wellbeing challenges which Wales faces. ColegauCymru develops opportunities for learners supported by our colleges, their staff and learners; promoting activity for young women and girls, and learners with additional learning needs remains a priority for everyone involved. The aim of ColegauCymru's Active Wellbeing strategy is to lead the sector in creating college communities that place the individual at the core of strategic development, creating outstanding environments for learners and staff in the process.

Additional Learning Needs

ColegauCymru is proud to host the position of the FE Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Implementation Lead, funded by Welsh Government. The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) and ALN Code became live for some learners in colleges in September 2023. This followed five years of transformation where colleges have sought to make enhancements to their provision, train staff and develop partnerships with Local Authorities, health boards and others. The FE Implementation Lead has worked closely with colleges to ensure a seamless experience for learners, and while there have been excellent examples of improved transition across Wales, there is still much to do to ensure a consistent picture for all. The recent Welsh Government 'Post-16 Transitions' event provided a great opportunity for ColegauCymru and FEI college representatives to share good practice with LA and school staff and it is hoped that this, along with other projects, will help to improve the picture across Wales.

Social Value of FE in Wales

This month, ColegauCymru launched a new report (you can read it [here](#)), demonstrating the social value of FE colleges in Wales. With grant funding from Welsh Government, ColegauCymru commissioned Cwmpas and the Centre for Local Economic Strategy to undertake a piece of research to establish the social value of FE in Wales. The report tells a positive story and provides an assessment and joint articulation of the collective social value of colleges in Wales; benefiting learners, community and society, and the wider economy, especially in light of recent difficult times with the ongoing fallout of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.

Working across the UK and beyond

ColegauCymru is a proud member of the Colleges Alliance which brings together college leaders and government officials from across the UK and Ireland to share learning and practice. On 25 and 26 June this year, the Alliance is hosting a 'study visit' to Coleg y Cymoedd which will bring together approximately 20 college deputy Principals and government deputy directors for a 24-hour immersive visit to explore the opportunities presented by the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. If your diary allows, we would like to invite you to take part in the event to share your reflections with delegates. I would be most grateful if you could let me know if that would be possible at your earliest convenience.

As you settle into the new role, I also hope you will accept my invitation to visit one of our colleges, to learn more about value of the FE sector in Wales. Once again, please accept my congratulations on your election as the new Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. I, and the ColegauCymru team, look forward to working with you and your team in the future.

Cofion gorau,



Kelly Edwards
Interim Chief Executive

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