

FAO: Committee Chair

Email Only

30 December 2020

UCU Response - Regulations to Establish Corporate Joint Committees

The University and College Union (UCU Wales) represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales. UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world. We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Ministers call for inspiration and fresh thought.

The national response to Covid 19 has seen a revitalisation in the confidence of local government. New patterns of collaboration and the need to plan and message across local and regional levels have strengthened capacity and arguably provide the conditions necessary for ensuring the success of CJsCs . But this is by no means the end of the story. As we emerge from the medical emergency to confront the uncertainties raised by of our exit from the European Union, the challenges are only likely to increase. In order that CJsCs are properly equipped to assume their role in delivering an 'equality led' recovery in a transitional economy, they will need to develop politically coherent engagement structures and the strategic tools to operate across a complex environment to deliver multiple objectives.

Given CJsCs central importance to the recently published Welsh Government Regional Investment Framework (November 2020), UCU is concerned by the perception which continues to surround these proposals in some quarters. Whilst we take no position on local government reorganisation, we have encountered a widely held belief that the regulations seek to resolve the 'unfinished business' of amalgamation. Referencing the OECD 'Future of Regional Development and Public Investment in Wales' (FRD 2020), UCU believes that these regulations represent a welcome occasion to operationalise many of the recommendations made. However, it is vital that Welsh Government addresses the misgivings of those who think that these arrangements go too far or not far enough, in order to create the trust relationships needed to ensure that CJsCs can be effective.

During the past 9 months, we have seen how adaptations under conditions of shock can boost the pace of innovation. In the same way that the pandemic has replaced physical distance with digital proximity, our exit from the European Union is likely to accelerate developments in automation. Tomorrow's Industry 4.0 & 5.0 will require

new patterns of working and habits of mind. Capabilities such as agility, collaboration and creativity are essential to the success of a modern economy. Whilst Prosperity for All and 'Fair Work provide useful frameworks, just transition must be complimented by a collaborative post-16 education sector which makes use of creative pedagogies. This will require a move away from heavy-handed performance management systems, which currently drive operational practice in the post 16 sector. Managerialism is a product of the last 50 years where its practices were used to address the concerns of low productivity. Brexit's impact upon migration makes this model unsustainable suggesting that business will adapt with increased automation. Post 16 education provision must be ready to address these new demands.

Refurbishing our industrial base infers additional challenges. Partly seeking to implement recommendations in the OECD FRD 2020, Welsh Governments recently published its Regional Investment Framework. The document makes the following observation;

“Pay progression is generally greater for those who move employer rather than those who stay in the same job or move into a new job with the same employer, and is even stronger for those who move employer and region. Management practices such as the provision of training, development of internal labour markets and flexible working have also been identified as important determinants of progression opportunities.”

Clearly, if Wales is to grow a high-quality industrial ecology in which good jobs are retained, it is imperative that we develop organic industries at the same time as attracting external investment. However, skills partnerships and FEI's currently model provision on the basis of historical and short-term vacancies. Accepting that we cannot build the houses of today with the bricks of tomorrow, thought needs to be given as to how CJC's education and investment functions interact with communities, FEI's, business (particularly SME's) and wider areas reserved by government; particularly funding for education and training; progression path-ways and Adult Community Learning/'Micro Credentials'.

Whereas Universities will confront their own set of challenges when EU research funding ends, Professor Graeme Reid's 'Strength in Diversity Report' (2020) at least sets out a transformative plan by which the sector can capture a greater share of UK research grants. FEI's contribution to a successful regional investment framework, will require the strategic levers by which provision can be matched to anticipated provision in the future, at the same time as responding to current and short term needs.

The resulting framework will need to be reconciled with Welsh Governments crucial commitment to a place-based program and equality led recovery. Indeed, given some of the political factors at play, it is difficult to see how this task can be achieved outside Welsh Government's strategic umbrella. Nor is this a simple academic point; ultimately, what is decided during the next 24 months will likely shape the life-chances of a generation of young people. Whether they will emerge from a 30 year industrial malaise to seize and create opportunities in a prosperous and more equal Wales, largely depends upon us getting this right now.

Finally, there is a need to ensure that the proposed regulations compliment established trade union and collective bargaining structures. Social partnership must

be at the centre of the new bodies, meaning that arrangements should be standardised and well defined.