



**WALES  
CYMRU**

**RESPONSE TO:**

**Support for foundation years**

**Contact Details:**

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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.

UCU was formed on the 1st June 2006 by the amalgamation of two strong partners – the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) – who shared a long history of defending and advancing educators’ employment and professional interests.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Support for foundation years.

**Question 1** – We have outlined a series of concerns regarding foundation year provision, principally that it represents poor value for money and does not obviously provide any benefit to the student when compared to the available alternative routes to higher education. Do you agree with this analysis? Why?

<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>x</b>
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### Supporting comments

As an organisation representing both the HE and FE sectors, UCU Wales are not in a position to agree or disagree with this statement. In terms of defining value for money, we do not equate this to quality. The focus should be on the quality of the provision rather than whether it represents ‘value for money’. We fundamentally disagree with the assertion that quality of education can be achieved through marketised competition.

From our point of view creating an extra burden of debt for students, is unacceptable and is counterproductive to widening participation.

In addition students need to be able access appropriate foundation level provision that will allow them the smoothest transition to HE, whether they are school leavers or returning adults.

What is important is that students are able to access high quality opportunities that adequately prepare them for HE, at a variety of easily accessible locations, at a stage appropriate to their personal circumstances, which will not cause financial disadvantage.

**Question 2** – Which of the four proposals do you think should be implemented? Why?

UCU Wales does not favour any of the suggested options, as we represent members in both the FE and HE and will therefore not take a position that favours one sector over the other.

Regardless of whether Foundation courses are delivered in HE or FE, we question why such courses attract a fee, as they are not, strictly speaking 'degree' level courses?

UCU fundamentally do not support the student fee regime, but neither do we advocate that HEI's should be excluded from the delivery of Foundation courses, if this is the best environment for students.

As above, what is important is that students are able to access high quality opportunities that adequately prepare them for HE, at a variety of easily accessible locations, at a stage appropriate to their personal circumstances, which will not cause financial disadvantage.

**Question 3** – Do you think our definition of foundation years at paragraph 30 will capture the type of provision we have discussed?

Not sure what the definition is. The paragraph states points to be considered in a definition, but it is not possible to agree or disagree without knowing exactly what the definition is.

We do however urge caution when using student attainment levels to define issues, as attainment levels are reliant on several factors, many of them outside the control of the provider.

**Question 4** – What do you think the impact on widening access will be if the Welsh Ministers were to cease support for these courses? Do you think any particular groups would be disadvantaged by this policy? What are the characteristics of the people taking these courses?

We have concerns that adult returners in particular would find it difficult to access HE, if support for Foundation courses was withdrawn. This would likely have an impact on second chance students who have previously been excluded from HE, for financial, health or caring reasons; those groups for whom widening access provision is most important.

As previously stated, in terms of widening access, promoting equality and social inclusion, what is important is that students are able to access high quality opportunities that adequately prepare them for HE, at a variety of easily accessible locations, at a stage appropriate to their personal circumstances, which will not cause financial disadvantage.

We are also concerned that the skills set, which lecturers delivering this provision in HE have, will be lost to the sector. In our view it would be a big mistake to lose this cohort of staff and their skills set given the direction of travel in relation to TEF. Transitioning staff in HE who deliver Foundation Studies, to support all school leavers new to HE would be, in our view, a sensible move within institutions, should the government decide to move this provision into FE.

**Question 5** – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

A crucial issue for UCU Wales, is that there is a long-term strategy for improving post 16 education which provides coherent progression routes for students. We therefore welcome the proposal set out in the Hazelkorn Review for a joint FE/HE body. However, we would like a commitment from this body and Welsh government that discrepancies in the workload implications for staff delivering HE in FE, compared to staff in HE, will be addressed and eliminated. Without this situation being rectified, it will not be possible to provide consistency in the quality of delivery or of student experience, regardless of where it's offered.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: