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National Assembly for Wales  
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills  
Committee  
Degree Apprenticeships

Evidence from University and College Union

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**WALES  
CYMRU**

## **Submission to EIS Inquiry into Degree apprenticeships**

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. It 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.

UCU would like to use the opportunity of this inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships to raise what we believe are fundamentally important issues for the future of education and training in Wales.

We have been extremely vocal over the years, indeed since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, about the need to address the issue of parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes to qualifications. It was the basis for our submission to the Welsh government that they should support parity of esteem in relation to the pay scales of school teachers and the lecturers. They did and we now have national pay scales for lecturers which are comparable to school teachers, they have been in place since 2006 in Wales. England still have college based pay scales which are on average about £4/5,000 below those of teachers.

The issue of parity of esteem is not just about recognising the value of each progression route. Pedagogy, especially in relation to vocational education, will be key to engaging learners, especially those who struggled in school, as life- long learners who can benefit from re-engaging in learning. Those benefits will also impact on the workplace and arguably the productivity of Wales as a nation.

We believe that much more thought needs to be given to the issue of pedagogy by all concerned - civil servants, politicians and most importantly educators, to ensure that Wales has an education system fit for the 21st century.

Before we provide a short commentary on the current degree apprenticeships, we are providing for the committee a copy of the submission UCU made to the consultation **Public Good and a**

**Prosperous Wales**, written by Bill Lucas<sup>1</sup>, Professor of Learning and Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning, University of Winchester, who is now working with the OECD on these issues.

UCU contend that any review of Degree Apprenticeships and their operation in Wales has to be considered within the contradictions which Lucas highlights in his paper. To ignore his arguments would be foolish and costly to the Welsh tax payer in the long run. To continue to create qualifications and pathways to educational attainment which don't address his concerns, we believe will continue to waste public money and limit the potential of the population in Wales, more of which later.

### **The Submission to PCET consultation, minus scope.**

#### **2. Headline observations**

The attempt to coordinate post 16 learning and education in Wales by the creation of a new coordinating body, the Commission is very welcome. Equally commendable is the powerful ambition to value both 'vocational' and 'academic' routes equally (although I do not accept this stark delineation between them). The ambition to learn from the best in the world which permeates the Consultation document is admirable, too.

#### *Unresolved tensions*

There are some unresolved tensions in the Consultation including:

- a) reconciling the vision of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 with the largely economic drivers which predominate in the Consultation;
- b) balancing national skills needs with global thinking about the purposes of education systems;
- c) recognising the very different contexts of school, college, university and work based learning in terms of their pedagogy; the 'key challenges' section of the Consultation (pp 9-10) makes no mention of this;
- d) moving beyond a binary view of 'academic' and 'vocational' systems in order to build parity of esteem.

Put more specifically, the Consultation focuses on structural issues rather than on pedagogy, the core of what drives the quality of learning across the different sectors which the Consultation is seeking to join up. If the Hazelkorn recommendation to create an integrated PCET system in Wales is to be realised, then that system needs an overarching vision for what

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Lucas recently chaired the creation of the professional teaching standards for the further education and work-based learning sectors in Wales. He is the author of a number of well-regarded research reports on vocational pedagogy, apprenticeships and employability, see references.

its desired outcomes are, an holistic and aspirational vision of the purposes of education in Wales. Against such a vision decisions about pedagogy can be taken; without it a paper like this is necessarily a more abstract structural conversation.

*(a) A lack of commitment to well-being*

With regards to well-being and resilience (p13) it is not clear how it is envisaged that the joined up systems of school, college, work based learning and universities will develop a more resilient or healthier Wales. Across the world there are examples of educational administrations seeking to do just this. The State of Victoria in Australia has set explicit targets for resilience and health, for example<sup>2 3</sup> in their schools, which might be emulated across all sectors in Wales. In vocational settings I have argued that resilience needs to be an explicit goal of FE and work based learning, (Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, 2012, pp 42-54), specifically a combination of resourcefulness and wider skills for growth. Impetus, 2014; pp 17-24) argues that resilience is essential for work. Interestingly the Confederation for British Industry (CBI, 2012) has made similar arguments, suggesting that grit, resilience and tenacity are essential outcomes from school. From the university perspective, resilience is becoming an issue of well-being and drop from courses, (McIntosh and Shaw, 2017). The Consultation neither acknowledges the need to make resilience an explicit goal of all education sectors, nor considers how resilience may be developed.

*(b) An outdated model of education*

Notwithstanding the very contemporary ambition of more joined-up provision, the language of the Consultation is strangely backward looking and pays little attention to developments across the world. It is littered with references to skills, has just seven mentions of the word knowledge and no acknowledgement of broader concepts such as competencies, capabilities or habits of mind. If four sectors – schools, FE, work based learning and HE are to be dealt with are holistically then it will be important to find a common language.

The OECD (2016; p 2) has articulated a model for Education in 2030 which indicates the need to think beyond knowledge and skills, see Figure 1:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/targets.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/targethappyhealthy.aspx>



**Figure 1 – Education 2013, OECD**

Competencies (or what countries such as Australia and Finland, for example, refer to as capabilities) are here shown as the complex interaction between knowledge, skill, values and attitudes. It is a model of this complexity but clarity which will be helpful if the four different sectors being brought together in the new body are to buy in to the vision.

An indication of this kind of thinking can be seen in the innovative domain tests being developed by PISA. In 2015, for example, it was ‘collaborative problem-solving’ and, in 2021, it will be ‘creative thinking’. But in the Consultation there is no recognition at all of these kinds of capabilities being desirable or valued. Arguably they could be a powerful way of aligning the needs of ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ pathways.

In the last decade we have begun to understand with greater clarity those capabilities which are particularly useful. The two lists in Table 1, the first from an economic perspective (Heckman & Kautz, 2013) and the second from educational researchers (Gutman & Schoon, 2013) are useful here. Both sets of researchers describe those capabilities or, in some cases, transferable skills, which will improve outcomes for individual learners and so for wider society.

Perseverance	Self-perception
Self-control	Motivation
Trust	Perseverance

Attentiveness Self-esteem and self- efficacy Resilience to adversity Openness to experience Empathy Humility Tolerance of diverse opinions Engaging productively in society	Self-control Metacognitive strategies Social competencies Resilience and coping Creativity
Heckman & Kautz,	Gutman & Schoon

**Table 1 - Capabilities for success in life**

I have summarised the research into this area in *Learning to be Employable*, suggesting a list of important habits of mind (capabilities) which are important for success in life, Table 2:

<b>Habits of Mind</b>	<b>Transferable Skills</b>
Self-belief	Communication
Self-control	Time-management
Perseverance	Self-management
Resilience	Problem-solving
Curiosity	Team-working
Empathy	Giving and receiving
Creativity	feedback
Craftsmanship	

**Table 2 - Centre for Real-World Learning's Habits of Mind and Transferable Skills for Employability**

*(c) Pedagogy: at the core of effective education*

The significant omission in the Consultation is any recognition of the importance of pedagogy<sup>4</sup> or teaching and learning methods and the degree to which these are different in different contexts and depending on different desired outcomes. In a general school setting where the context is the classroom there is a well-developed and longstanding literature here, see, for example, Watkins and Mortimore (1999). At HE level, while less long-lived, there is a well-established tradition of

<sup>4</sup> For a definition of pedagogy see Lucas, Claxton and Spencer (2013) – ‘...the science, art and craft of teaching. Pedagogy also fundamentally includes the decisions which are taken in the creation of the broader learning culture in which the teaching takes place and the values which inform all interactions’

research of which Hénard and Roseveare (2012) is a good overview. In HE and FE the issue of older learners needs to be addressed. That's to say that the maturity and motivation of adult learners are likely to be different from those at school. 'Andragogy' (Knowles, 1970) has been the term used for fifty years to mark this distinction.

The missing element to this debate has been a research-led discussion of pedagogy for vocational education of all kinds, something I have investigated at some depth over the last decade (Lucas and Spencer, 2015; Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, 2012).

The following list is indicative of methods which are relatively well-understood in some contexts. The majority are broadly 'learning by doing' or 'experiential', though many combine reflection, feedback and theory. For each one there is significant research to suggest that it is effective in vocational education:

- Learning by watching
- Learning by imitating
- Learning by practising ('trial and error')
- Learning through feedback
- Learning through conversation
- Learning by teaching and helping
- Learning by real-world problem-solving
- Learning through enquiry
- Learning by thinking critically and producing knowledge
- Learning by listening, transcribing and remembering
- Learning by drafting and sketching
- Learning by reflecting
- Learning on the fly
- Learning by being coached
- Learning by competing
- Learning through virtual environments
- Learning through simulation and role play
- Learning through games.

Of course some of these methods will sit well in schools and universities, too. My point is that, the new Commission will need at least to recognise the complexities and subtleties of vocational pedagogy in colleges and work based learning settings as it seeks to take an overview of very different kinds of learning.

The obvious difference between work based learning and that provided by schools and universities is that the setting is primarily a work place not a learning place. As Joe Harkin (2012) reminds us:

*There is no one-size-fits-all approach. There is a strong consensus that effective teaching methods for vocational learning are based on realistic work problems and scenarios, led by teachers and trainers who have recent and relevant vocational experience.*

*(d) Parity of esteem*

In its wish for parity of esteem between sectors the Consultation joins a long list of bodies tasked with bringing this about. But for as long as the emphasis is on structures rather than on what actually goes on – pedagogy - the evidence suggests that this is unlikely to come about.

In *How to teach vocational education* (2012) I argue that the most important requirement is for those delivering vocational education, via apprenticeships, via colleges and in workplaces need to set a much more ambitious set of goals. For the danger is that vocational routes are seen simply as means of developing skills and expertise for the workplace. I suggest a very broad specification of the kinds of capabilities that should be central to vocational education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. Routine expertise (being skilful)
2. Resourcefulness (stopping to think to deal with the non-routine)
3. Functional literacies (communication, and the functional skills of literacy, numeracy, and ICT)
4. Craftmanship (vocational sensibility; aspiration to do a good job; pride in a job well done)
5. Business-like attitudes (commercial, entrepreneurial, social)
6. Wider skills (for employability and lifelong learning).

Too often vocational education is defined by the first of these six outcomes and inevitably suffers when compared to ‘academic’ alternatives at school or university.

Our research into the teaching of vocational education was specifically recognised with regards to issues of parity in the first serious national study of these issues led by Frank Mcloughlin (2013) in the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL):

*For too long, the sophisticated and connected process of teaching, training and learning has been undervalued. The Commission therefore agrees with Lucas, Spencer and Claxton (2012) about the importance of codifying, recognising and valuing the sophisticated practice of vocational pedagogy.*

*Question 14 – Models for a Quality Assurance Framework*



Any model will need to have resonance for schools, colleges, work based learning settings and universities. The European Quality Cycle<sup>5</sup> offers a useful framework which might be adapted to include a common set of desired outcomes (see page 5) into which each sector could buy?

# THE QUALITY CYCLE

of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training

**1. Purpose and Plan**  
Set up clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources.

**2. Implementation**  
Establish procedures to ensure the achievement of goals and objectives (e.g. development of partnerships, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational or operational procedures).



**4. Review**  
Develop procedures in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and/or new objectives; after processing feedback, key stakeholders conduct discussion and analysis in order to devise procedures for change.

**3. Assessment and Evaluation**  
Design mechanisms for the evaluation of achievements and outcomes by collecting and processing data in order to make informed assessment.

QUALITY INDICATORS		
<p><b>1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share of providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law or own initiative</li> <li>• Share of accredited VET providers</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Completion rate in VET programmes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and individual criteria</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. Utilization of acquired skills in the workplace</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to the type of training and individual criteria</li> <li>• Satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share of teacher and trainers participating in further training</li> <li>• Amount of funds invested</li> </ul>	<p><b>5. Placement rate in VET programmes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribution of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and individual criteria</li> </ul>	<p><b>7. Unemployment rate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to individual criteria</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Participation rate in VET programmes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and individual criteria</li> </ul>	<p><b>8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups in a defined region or catchment area according to age and gender</li> <li>• Success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender</li> </ul>	<p><b>9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels</li> <li>• Evidence of their effectiveness</li> </ul>
		<p><b>10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on existing schemes at different levels</li> <li>• Evidence of their effectiveness</li> </ul>



For further information consult: [www.eqavet.eu](http://www.eqavet.eu) and [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)



## Question 15 – A focus on quality enhancement

There is a good opportunity for engaging directly with the workforce as part of their professional learning in this process and in line with the recently revised professional standards for teachers and those working in FE and WBL. Alignment post 16 will be important and challenging and a framework which enabled teachers and practitioners to engage, formatively with these issues might be useful as the Commission begins its work.

## Question 16 – Apprenticeships and the Commission

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/policy-context/european-quality-assurance-reference-framework.aspx>

It is a telling omission to me that this question sits within a section on financial and governance assurance. My earlier comments on the need for ambitious outcomes and a focus of pedagogies which best deliver these are of critical importance here. If the Commission is to oversee the uptake of more apprentices at level 4 and above, then a far more fundamental consideration of pedagogy for apprenticeship is required.

As with my earlier comments the first stage is to define the outcomes wanted from apprenticeships before rushing into structures and accountabilities. In *Remaking Apprenticeships* (2015) we defined an apprentice in ways which make clear a level of ambition:

*An apprenticeship is a mutually beneficial relationship between a learner and an employer in which an individual, through a blend of on- and off-the-job methods and by working with other more skilled people, becomes competent in a chosen occupation. By competence we include both routine and non-routine expertise. Apprenticeship, in addition, equips potential employees with the habits of mind of someone who has a deep pride in the vocational activity for which they are being formed, while at the same time developing the wider skills they will need for a lifetime of working and learning. While the learning will focus on the demands of contemporary workplaces, it will also unambiguously seek to prepare the apprentice morally and socially for active citizenship.*

Apprentices differ from school, college and university students in that they are primarily employees rather than learners.

Despite the many different kinds and levels of apprenticeships our research has suggested that there are three key features of apprenticeship learning:

1. The fact that they require both *on and off-the-job learning*.
2. Their social context – that they require *learning from and with others* within a community of practice.
3. The requirement for *visibility of learning processes* – as an integral aspect of the first two and as an increasingly acknowledged feature of effective learning wherever it takes place.

These are explored in more detail in *Remaking Apprenticeships*.

There are many issues that could be explored in more detail but three seem most important; a consideration of the amount of time it takes to become really skilled and how not enough time is allowed in higher level apprenticeships; the enormous opportunities of digital learning and the specific complexities of the social partnership between employer, college

and work based learning provider in the provision of apprenticeship learning.

*Question 22 – Retention and completion*

The higher the quality of the learning the more likelihood of better retention. Sophisticated pedagogy and high-quality teachers and work based learning practitioners are the key.

We hope that the committee will consider the questions and challenges posed by Lucas in their considerations in relation to this inquiry and consider the limitations of structural change with regards to the new PCET body.

As we stated earlier, much more thought has to be given by the Welsh Government to pedagogy when it comes to apprenticeships and the routes to higher levels. Some argue that an apprenticeship in and of itself should suffice as the qualification. The recently announced review Qualified for life by Qualification Wales, in our view, argues for more of the same but with tweaks to address the new curriculum. Surely now is the time in Wales, with the introduction of the new school curriculum, to have this discussion about how we develop education and training fit for the future which meets the aspirations of Future generations legislation and the communities in Wales.

As a union we actively support the concept of lifelong learning and are eager to see educational opportunities opened up to members of society who have not – for whatever reasons - pursued HE. Providing a higher skilled workforce can improve industrial competitiveness, better pay and make a positive contribution to the social and economic fabric of Wales.

The funding for degree apprenticeships in Wales is welcome and the differentiated approach to England has positives and pitfalls (overspent in England too narrow in Wales.)

It has encouraged employers and universities to work together in the interests of sectors and individual learners/ apprentices but the scope of provision and timeframes for getting 'bids' in have been too tight. The employers need more time to work with Universities and plan their new intakes and workforce upskilling in a more timely manner. We also need to consider how it looks to say a Tech business who could set up in Bristol, Manchester or Cardiff/ Wrexham.... if L7 is not available then the risk is high skill jobs go over the border.

The impact on cross border flows of activity and potential inward investment and retention of high level skills in Wales is undermined by a lack of provision at L7 and the current narrow focus on 2 key sectors.

Employers can develop high skills at Level 7 under levy in England this makes it more difficult to attract and retain those employers wishing to develop and recruit a Level 7 plus workforce in Wales.

Attention should be given to the impact of professions being degree apprenticeships in one part of the UK and not another e.g. particularly public sector nursing, policing, social work and allied healthcare professions - there is a risk that a less diverse and fewer numbers will be attracted to come to Wales where the route in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland is in effect free to the learner.

The potential to drive more progression for existing employees to upskill in the workforce could be played up with employers in key sectors. For instance, more could be done to enable Universities to work with employers to provide part time pathways in to the professions using degree apprenticeships.

There is an over fascination with whole awards and an equal focus should be given to enable those seeking to upskill to be able to do this with their employer within existing contracts ... the adult population and age profile of Wales means we need to upskill the existing workforce and bring in new talent.

The employer voice in the process should be balanced with that of Trade Unions and wider equality considerations. Who is benefitting from degree apprenticeships in Wales - who is being left behind? What is being done with BAAME and disabled groups to encourage pathways up the qualification ladder to degree apprenticeships from a range of starting points? Is the stereotype one of young white 18 year olds?

Cost comparisons with lower level provision are not helpful and the focus should be on the benefit to the individual (anti-poverty / anti-low wage and widening access) the benefit to the local economy - paying tax and NI from the start and no student debt and the increased skills and talent pool staying in the region for longer - that creates a situation in which employees want to stay within in a company.

Much more consideration needs to be given to the reality of employment in Wales and size of the SME sector. More work needs to be done to enable pooling amongst SMEs and with large private and public bodies to get depth of experience to cover off all learning.

Finally, there is an issue in the sector about staff having the appropriate level of qualifications within the FE sector to deliver degree

apprenticeships, again an issue in relation to pedagogy from staff perspective that is being ignored.

We sincerely hope that the committee will take our concerns on board and reflect these in their recommendations.

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