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**Universities as Global Communities – discussion paper**

**Bangor University – 13 February 2020**

Many thanks for registering for our conference, jointly organised by Universities Wales and the Learned Society of Wales. The event will have several opportunities for interaction and discussion, during which we will consider four key questions. This paper invites participants to reflect on the questions prior to arrival, so that you have the maximum opportunity to contribute on the day.

**Context**

The event forms part of the Society’s Wales and the World event series – deepening understanding and discussion of the nation’s ‘soft power’. The two previous events in the series were:

* **Soft Power Strategies** – held at Cardiff Metropolitan University on 28 October 2019, this event explored different perspectives on soft power, and looked to offer practical suggestions to develop Wales’s international profile
* **The Role of Arts and Culture in Developing Wales’s International Profile** – hosted by Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum Wales, this considered culture as one of Wales’s most significant ‘soft power’ resources, with a focus on museums, literature, TV production and our bilingual nation

The series was conceived in light of Welsh Government’s decision to develop a new International Strategy, which aims to promote Wales as an outward-looking nation ready to work and trade with the rest of the world.

Within this context, our higher education institutions play a vital role as places to study, research and live. Universities are developing not only as international recruiters, but as ‘global communities’ – connecting Wales to other countries, enriching cultural diversity, and multiplying the nation’s impact through connections with partners and researchers throughout the world.

**Session 1 – What is the Welsh sector’s position within UK and global contexts?**

This session will open with keynote addresses on *The View from Wales* (Professor Iwan Davies – Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University / Chair of Global Wales) and *The UK View* (Vivienne Stern – Director, Universities UK International). A panel discussion and audience Q & A will follow.

Background information:

* International students represent 17% of students in Wales. There are 22,000 international students and 2,500 international staff across Wales’ universities from 140 countries (2015/16).
* In 2017/18 there were 1,485 EEA nationals working in Welsh universities, accounting for 7% of the total workforce. This proportion rises to 11% amongst the academic workforce.
* Global Wales promotes our HE sector internationally, drawing together British Council Wales, Universities Wales, Welsh Government and HEFCW. It seeks to deliver a consistent message about the quality and diversity of HE in Wales; to develop further international links; to support universities in their international activities; and to help grow the HE sector’s contribution to Wales’s economy and cultural relations with the rest of the world.
* Universities UK International represents universities across the UK – acting in their collective interests by promoting them abroad, providing information for and about them, and creating new opportunities for the sector.
* Other opportunities exist at UK level – for example, the UK government’s ‘Great Britain’ campaign – but how do we square these with Wales’s distinctive national identity?

Questions for consideration:

* If the UK Higher Education brand is pivotal, how can the Welsh HE sector better ‘sell’ the excellence of our institutions, and the particular benefits of studying in Wales? What is the distinctive essence of Wales and its HE?
* How can Wales make stronger use of UK Government departments/bodies/campaigns to promote the sector, and to encourage recruitment of students and staff?
* Do we have the ‘right’ goals when promoting our universities? To what extent do universities consider factors other than the income brought into Wales by international students?

**Session 2 – How can the sector develop a more distinctive international image?**

In this session, we will consider the potential for Wales’s HE sector to develop a distinctive ‘offer’ that differentiates it in a crowded global market. Our speakers will consider how Wales can be project as an internationally engaged or ‘outward looking’ nation; and the role of Wales’s national commitment to sustainable development through the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Background information:

* In terms of student recruitment, Global Wales makes efforts to emphasis the uniqueness of Wales. The [Study in Wales](http://www.studyinwales.ac.uk/) website highlights devolution, Welsh history and culture, outdoor activities, and quality of life.
* Global Wales has recently aligned and partnered with Welsh Government’s Brand Wales activity, so that study is now one of the ‘sector pillars’ in their portfolio. The HE sector adds key global reach to the “team Wales” approach alongside business, tourism and food and drink sectors, contributing to “one voice, one brand” in promoting Wales to the world. (You will see new banners and brochures at the event.)
* Wales’s official bilingual status makes it distinctive amongst the UK nations, and the Welsh language is part of efforts to promote the sector internationally.
* The Welsh Government has recently published its [International Strategy](https://gov.wales/international-strategy-for-wales) in an effort to raise Wales’s profile internationally, grow the economy and establish Wales as a globally responsible nation. The strategy:
	+ Highlights three ‘centres of excellence’ for development over the coming years – cybersecurity, compound semiconductors, and the creative industries
	+ Highlights the role of universities as globally connected institutions with world-leading research and international links
	+ Recognises the cultural and economic impact of Welsh universities’ international activities, which contributes over £600m to the Welsh economy
	+ Commits the government to working with the sector to increase the number of international students in Wales
	+ Recognises the significant impact that Welsh research has relative to other nations and regions, and notes that Wales is the best place in the UK for the number of graduate start-ups
	+ Highlights Global Wales’ work with Vietnam, supporting the aim for Wales to be a globally responsible nation
* The [Well-being of Future Generations Act](https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/) is often described as a unique piece of Welsh legislation, codifying sustainable development as a duty of our public bodies. This has the potential for further promotion internationally.

Questions for consideration:

* To what extent does the Welsh HE sector currently project a ‘distinctive image’ that differentiates it from other countries? To what extent is this needed? Can it be enhanced?
* If Wales’s distinctiveness is not sufficiently exploited, what elements should be emphasised in future?
* Does the International Strategy sufficiently address the role of Welsh HE? Does it offer scope for more positive governmental support?
* Are there trade-offs between international recruitment/collaboration/reputation and enhancing economic development in Wales?
* Can the sector do more to encourage Wales to play its part in addressing the climate crisis, and to address global challenges such as the SDGs?

**Session 3 – How can Welsh institutions work more effectively with international partners?**

International partners are a core part of our universities’ global research and industry networks, which are vital to delivering world-class, high-impact research. Wales already has a strong track record in research collaboration, but the future is uncertain – particularly when considering Wales’s current reliance on EU structural funds to complement competitive research funding.

Some Welsh universities have established international campuses to capitalise on their strong reputation in specific fields. Other relevant partners include alumni, honorary fellows and past academics who now live outside Wales. Domestic partners, such as our national cultural and sporting bodies, also have international connections which can be valuable to the HE sector.

Background information:

* The Learned Society’s [*Wales and the World*](https://www.learnedsociety.wales/our-publications/wales-and-the-world/)report highlights the international standing of the sector. Amongst other findings, Wales accounts for a high proportion of the world’s top-cited research papers, and is one of the most efficient countries at translating research income into high-impact research.
* In [REF 2014](http://www.uniswales.ac.uk/research-excellence-framework-2014/), Welsh universities had the highest proportion of ‘world-leading’ research in terms of its impact of any part of the UK, with over three-quarters of the research submitted considered ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’. In 2014, 46% of Welsh publications were internationally co-authored.
* The Welsh Government’s [2018 annual report on Horizon 2020](https://gov.wales/horizon-2020-wales-annual-report-2018) highlights that Wales has had 2,820 international collaborative links, with 70 countries and 1,695 non-UK organisations to date.
* Wales has relied heavily on EU Structural and Investment Funds to support research projects and infrastructure – significantly more so than any other UK nation/region. From 2014-20, such funds amounted to €788 per capita (UK average = €172 per capita).
* Our institutions have strategic partnerships with universities in countries as diverse as Belgium, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Malaysia, Namibia, Singapore, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the USA and Vietnam.
* An estimated 500,000 Welsh diaspora – plus many more alumni from Welsh universities – live in other countries. Global Wales recently held its first ‘alumni sub-group’ with universities to deliver the alumni engagement strand of the Welsh Government’s Diaspora Plan, initiated by the International Department.

Questions for consideration:

* How can Wales and individual institutions maintain and develop their international partnerships – particularly in light of an uncertain future relationship with the EU?
* What are the lessons from successful and unsuccessful partnerships??
* Are there partnership opportunities – internationally and with other bodies in Wales – that are currently being missed, or not developed as fully as they should be?
* Depending on the aims of the UK Government, should Wales seek its own relations with Horizon Europe and other international groupings?
* Is there greater scope for cooperation between institutions in Wales to promote international collaboration?
* How can our universities engage more effectively with Welsh diaspora and alumni, and for what purposes?

**Session 4 – How do people in Wales benefit from universities’ international connections?**

Universities are highly aware of their responsibility to the communities in which they are situated. Researchers can cite many examples of excellent impact for people in Wales – whether economic, social or cultural. It is important that this forms part of our vision for globally connected universities – with people in our local communities sharing the benefits.

Our speakers will open this session by reflecting on how Wales is enriched culturally by people from other countries making their home here – and how universities, in turn, are developing their civic engagement programmes.

Background information:

* Welsh Government requires HEFCW funding to further universities’ regional and national civil leadership – with a focus on social enterprise, links with schools, and active citizenship. HEFCW’s publication [*Innovation Nation: On common ground*](https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/hefcw_reports_and_statistics/INNOVATION%20NATION%20-%20ON%20COMMON%20GROUND%20-%20FINAL%20ENGLISH.pdf)highlights some case studies of how universities have pursued their civic mission.
* A [report](https://www.uniswales.ac.uk/new-report-launched-the-economic-impact-of-higher-education-in-wales-2/) by Viewforth Consulting, published in 2017 using 2015/16 data, detailed the economic benefit of non-UK students for Wales:
	+ Every non-UK student generated £54.2k of Welsh output
	+ One Welsh job was generated by every nine non-UK students in Wales
	+ Every non-UK student generated £27.8k of Welsh GVA
* Welsh universities’ international activity generated over £500 million of export earnings and attracted over 50,000 visitors to Wales with an average spend per visit of £398 per visit.
* The internationalisation of Welsh campuses allows domestic students and staff of all backgrounds to develop a global mind-set as well as improved language skills and an enhanced cultural awareness – all of which benefits Wales’ communities.
* A [survey](http://www.uniswales.ac.uk/wp/media/2011-March-The-Impact-of-International-and-EU-Students-in-Wales.pdf) of alumni who graduated from Welsh institutions between 1966 and 2010 found that 89% of respondents were at least ‘likely’ to promote Wales as a tourist destination to acquaintances.

Questions for consideration:

* How else might Wales, its industries and its communities take advantage of the international connections of our universities?
* How can we ensure that people in Wales feel connected to their universities supporting the unique dimension of studying in Wales?
* How can Wales better harness the contributions of international students, researchers and staff to the nation and its economy?
* What does universities’ ‘internationalism’ offer to people or communities that have little or no regular connection to our universities, and who – in some cases – might think less positively about such global connections?