

**National Assembly for Wales, Enterprise and Business Committee -  
Inquiry into Youth Entrepreneurship:  
Written Comments from Higher Education Wales (HEW)**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Higher Education Wales (HEW) represents the interests of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales and is a National Council of Universities UK. HEW's Governing Council consists of the Vice-Chancellors of all the HEIs in Wales and the Director of the Open University in Wales. The following comments respond to the Committee's request for written evidence for its Inquiry into Youth Entrepreneurship.

## **2. An overview of youth entrepreneurship in universities in Wales**

2.1 Universities in Wales conduct and engage with a wide range of activities to support youth entrepreneurship in line with the Welsh Government's Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES), which is targeted at 16 to 24 year olds. This forms part of a wider policy context which emphasises the importance of the role of universities in promoting economic growth and providing jobs for the economy through increasing interaction between universities and business, equipping graduates with entrepreneurial skills and experience, and in fostering entrepreneurship more generally. The recent track-record of universities in Wales is comparatively strong in this respect. For instance:

- There were 267 graduate start-ups from universities in Wales in 2010/11, nearly 10% of the UK total, i.e. almost double what you would expect for the size of the Welsh sector.<sup>1</sup>
- The percentage of full-time first degree leavers from universities in employment six months after leaving was 91% for Wales compared to 90% for the UK in 2010/11.<sup>2</sup>
- A recent analysis of delivery through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) funded Enterprise Support Programme showed that over 65% of students received entrepreneurship skills training as an in-curriculum activity.
- Wales has also pioneered on a range of initiatives in this area, including being the first to validate enterprise modules for teacher training.

2.2 The range of activities conducted by universities covers the full spectrum of stages in the development of youth entrepreneurship from early engagement and raising awareness of opportunities through to support for starting up in business. This includes:

- Embedding enterprise in the curriculum. All universities in Wales have embedded enterprise skills within their curricula through a variety of means including e.g.

---

<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA). "Higher Education-Business and Community Interaction Survey (HEBCIS) 2010/11." 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), "HESA Performance Indicators 2010/11", Table e1. 2012.

generic module options, components of existing courses, or specific enterprise projects. There are also academic programmes which specialise in entrepreneurship such as the BSC (Hons) in Entrepreneurship at Glyndŵr.

- Providing a range of extra-curricular activities, including skills development workshops, practical enterprise courses, events and opportunities. Examples include e.g. the “Enterprise Wednesday” events at Aberystwyth University or the i-Solve initiative led by Cardiff University.
- Holding competitions, awards, innovation and business challenges, and prizes designed to encourage entrepreneurial activity. Examples include the Future Entrepreneurship Awards and ‘Pi in the Sky’ competition at the University of South Wales.
- Promotional activity and engagement designed to foster an entrepreneurial culture and identify opportunities including working with young people in schools and further education as well as at university, or in business or the wider economy. This includes targeted activities and events to stimulate interest, motivate and inspire potential entrepreneurs.
- Providing information and guidance e.g. information for the Welsh Government’s Big Ideas campaign.
- Engagement between universities and businesses/entrepreneurs including student interns and placements.
- Building networks e.g. enterprise societies, graduate networks – for instance, the monthly Zone breakfasts at Glyndŵr University.
- Providing start-up support, including mentoring, guidance and workshops and surgeries. An example is the higher education/further education buddying system for students at Cardiff Metropolitan University.
- Provision of incubation and related facilities – for instance, the Business Loft at the Newport campus of the University of South Wales supported by grant from Newport Unlimited, Newport’s regeneration company.

2.3 These activities are supported by a wide variety of dedicated sources of funding in addition to being financed by universities’ general income. The Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy formed the basis for the development of the Welsh Government funded Regional Hub and Continuing Professional Development Hub activities. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) currently also provides a source of funding. These programmes in particular have helped to fund and underpin the framework in which universities deliver support for entrepreneurship. Universities engage in Welsh Government funded activities such as the Enterprise Hubs, Graduate start-up support, High Potential Starts Programme, and Dynamo Role Model presentations. A feature of many of the initiatives in this area is that they are collaborative, involving several universities and/or a variety of different partnerships.

### 3. Examples of good practice

### 3.1 The following examples illustrate a range of key activities:

- **Enterprise Support Programme**, a pan-Wales activity led by the University of South Wales and involving all universities in Wales. This Programme seeks to identify innovative and effective practice across the whole of the HE sector and then to disseminate these activities to all universities in Wales. The Programme develops and encourages fledgling entrepreneurs from across the student body in Wales to realise their potential for creating new and innovative businesses and feeds into the support available from Welsh Government's Start-up Service. This includes, for instance, entrepreneurial effectiveness training and one-to-one sessions for students and graduates.
- The **Centre for Student Entrepreneurship** at Cardiff Metropolitan University is the South East Wales Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) HE regional entrepreneurship hub and provides the main focus for student entrepreneurship activities for universities in the South East covering all aspects of the YES strategy focussed on engaging, empowering and equipping young potential entrepreneurs. At Cardiff Metropolitan University, this focuses around the entrepreneurship society 'LaunchPad' and a range of associated activities and programmes.
- The **Entrepreneurial University Development Group** at Swansea University, which was established by its Swansea Employability Academy, brings together all staff and student representatives who are concerned with an aspect of supporting and developing student entrepreneurship including teaching, start-ups and strategy development.
- The **Driving Enterprise and Innovation** in the Cardiff City Region is an excellent example of an initiative to embed entrepreneurship in a university through collaboration. Here we see the Cardiff City Council and HEFCW working with Cardiff University to drive innovation and enterprise within the city region. This initiative has two main strands – 1) the embedding of entrepreneurship across the curricula at Cardiff to ensure that graduates are exposed to entrepreneurship regardless of the discipline of the degree studied, and 2) the exploitation of basic research through grand challenges leading to innovative solutions.
- The University of Wales: Trinity Saint David was the first university in the UK to validate an **Entrepreneurial Educators module** for the teacher training qualifications, PGCE/PCET.
- The annual **Creative Futures Week** at Glyndŵr University is a unique annual conference, for Glyndwr University's Creative Industries, Media and Performance

students, provided numerous opportunities to find out about different sectors of work including self-employment and learn from experienced professionals. A significant number of the speakers are graduates who came back to share their insight and knowledge to help current students with their employability including e.g. talks on graduate start-ups and presentations from Dynamo Role models.

- The **Academic Champions of Enterprise Project** demonstrates the impact that the fostering of academic entrepreneurship in universities more generally can have for encouraging young entrepreneurs and is reported to have led to a marked increase in student enterprise activity with the ACE schools/departments at the three consortium partners – Aberystwyth, Bangor and Swansea Universities, led by Bangor University. The project led to the introduction of innovative assessment practices (such as the use of Dragon’s Den style assessments).
- **Skills and Employability Framework** - In 2012, Higher Education Wales (HEW), the Confederation of Business & Industry (Wales), National Union of Students (Wales), and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) jointly developed a framework for skills and employability that commits the four organisations to working in partnership to improve the job-related skills of Wales’ graduates. The vision is to support growth in providing highly skilled, quality jobs across Wales and to produce graduates that are able to demonstrate and communicate their value to prospective employers in Wales and further afield. The accompanying action plan focuses on three areas: work placements and work experience; employer approved courses; and embedding employability (including entrepreneurship) skills.
- The **Graduate Opportunities Wales (GO Wales)** offers a range of services proven to help students, graduates and business in Wales including: work placements, funding for training, an online database of jobs in Wales and the Graduate Academy, and a ‘free-lancer academy’. GO Wales is managed by HEFCW and is delivered by University Careers Services in Wales. Between 2009-2011, 1413 students and graduates have secured paid GO Wales work placements with businesses in Wales; 65% of students and graduates on placement were offered longer term work once the work placement had ended; 1128 students and graduates have taken part in a Work Taster to improve their employability; 1650 businesses have taken part in GO Wales.
- The University of South Wales is leading on Welsh Government’s **Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy CPD Hub** for Wales over the next three years to provide a pan Wales approach to the development of entrepreneurial teaching and learning, seeking to embed a culture of entrepreneurship in Welsh institutions by developing staff and in turn increasing the number of small firms in Wales,

increasing alternative forms of enterprise and increasing skill levels to develop Wales' potential for growth.

- A range of **on-line resources** has been developed, in particular, by the Open University in Wales. This includes, for instance, a self-service careers advisory area, the OpenLearn portal which provides a free 20 hour web resource on entrepreneurial behaviour, free audio podcasts and themed around entrepreneurial opportunities on their iTunes U channel and will include access to an on-line non-accredited course in rural entrepreneurship.

#### 4. Impact

4.1 Although impact is difficult to assess, there are number of indications that current initiatives are leading to increased success. In addition to the comparatively high number of graduate start-ups from Welsh universities and strong track-record in graduates entering employment that can be seen in the public statistics (see 2.1 above), there is a variety of sources of evidence within institutions:

- Cardiff Metropolitan University confirmed that students graduating through their Hub demonstrated an increased interest in self-employment as an option at graduation.
- Glyndŵr University reported that 5% of its most recent graduates are either self-employed or starting their own business, their highest figure ever.
- The number of graduate businesses recorded by the University of South Wales more than doubled between academic year 2010-11 and 2011-12, from 16 to 35.

#### 5. Conclusion

5.1 Despite the volume and success of this activity across universities in Wales, it is recognised that, in common with countries across Europe, there is further potential for supporting youth entrepreneurship. In particular, the issues identified by our members include:

- There remains a need for local, affordable business incubation space, and related funding to support low-risk trials.
- There is a gap in the support available for students to begin a start-up before graduation, because they are not classified as either graduates or unemployed.
- It is recommended that there should be further consolidation of existing good practice and that funding streams to support young entrepreneurs are maintained and delivered in partnership with higher education and further education institutions.
- A continued source of designated funding for activity and financial support for graduate start-ups is essential to maintain and increasing activity.