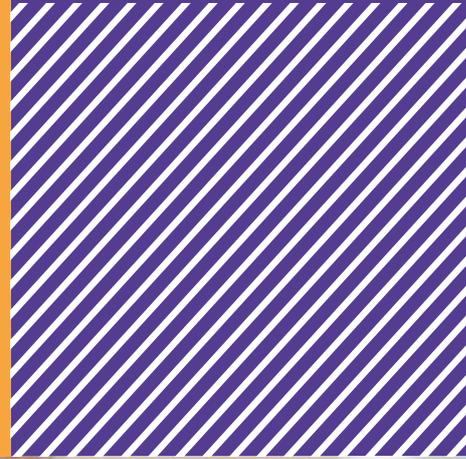




Prifysgolion
Cymru
Universities
Wales

A guide to higher
education in Wales

Skills for the future



There are more than 130,000 students in higher education in Wales, studying programmes from accounting to zoology.

Beyond the traditional undergraduate, master's and PhD routes, Welsh universities provide a variety of flexible learning opportunities to ensure higher education is accessible, creating highly skilled workers for the future.

The workplace is changing. The future offers both opportunities and challenges for universities as the economy shifts to one where automation and AI become increasingly important. An ageing population and a decline in new entrants to the workforce will mean that finding ways for people of all ages and backgrounds to reskill and upskill will become ever more important.

Wales has the highest per capita rate of university-delivered CPD in the UK, providing over 250,000 days' worth of professional development in 2019-20.

Degree apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships are integrated degree programmes that involve employers, and where on the job learning plays as important a role as the time spent studying at university. They offer a new route to gaining a degree that will play a vital role in enabling those already in the workforce or who have responsibilities that make full-time study challenging to access university-level learning.

The programme is in the final stage of a pilot, covering three areas: IT/computing, engineering, and advanced manufacturing. Employers in Wales can offer a degree apprenticeship in these subject areas through a partnership with a university in Wales.

Degree apprentices work alongside experienced employees to gain practical skills and experience while receiving external training. This means that degree apprentices finish their course with skills learned in the workplace, as well as the higher-level knowledge that comes with a degree qualification.

The apprenticeships run for the duration of the degree course with apprentices spending around 20% of their time at university and the rest with their employer. In Wales, a degree apprenticeship will be a minimum of three years and usually up to a maximum of five years in length.

Universities Wales advocates an expansion of the Degree Apprenticeship programme beyond its three-year pilot and into a broader range of subject areas and up to Master's level, with a continued commitment to widening access and attracting students from a range of backgrounds.

Widening access

Universities play a crucial role in social mobility. Much of the work universities do in this area falls under the heading 'widening access'. Every university has a fee and access plan, which sets out how they will attract, retain and support under-represented groups, including those with protected characteristics, to ensure they can achieve their full potential.

Fee and access plans include, for example, the methods universities use to communicate with students and prospective students about the financial support available to them, how they raise aspirations among school-aged pupils to encourage them to consider higher education, and how they support their respective students' unions to champion equality and diversity.

In 2018/19, 39% of students at Welsh universities had a home address within the bottom two quintiles of Lower Super Output Areas in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014.

The percentage of students from low participation neighbourhoods – areas with fewer people going to universities – at Welsh universities is higher than the UK average. For the academic years of entry 2015/16 to 2019/20, Wales had 15.6% of first degree students from low participation neighbourhoods, compared to a UK average of 11.8%.

Flexible learning opportunities

Universities have developed new ways of delivering higher-level skills to people of all ages and backgrounds - including through degree apprenticeships - and a part-time offering is core to this. Universities are committed to expanding the breadth and reach of our skills offer, including part-time and lifelong learning.

Getting results

Universities UK's Getting Results campaign in summer 2021 highlighted the contributions made by universities to the UK's recovery, based on data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, ONS and Innovate UK data.

The research found that, over the next five years, universities in Wales will:



Give 4,000 years' worth of upskilling and training to businesses and charities



Help 1,300 new businesses and charities to be formed



Train 10,000 nurses, 4,000 medics, and 8,000 teachers