

EXTRACT : SPEECH

A vision for Higher Education

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First published: 8 June 2022. Last updated: 8 June 2022

Thank you colleagues.

It's great to be here as part of Trinity St David's bicentennial celebrations.

Now I gather that back in the eighteen twenties it took almost 25 years from the first proposal to establish the university to the first twenty-six students arriving in Lampeter.

I know that these days there are occasional frustrations with government, HEFCW or local authorities regarding planning and capital funding decisions...

But even then, I think we're slighter fleet of foot in getting permissions and funding out of the door...

More seriously, I would like to thank Medwin for the use of the facilities here at the technique today.

Like all higher education institutions I know the university of Wales Trinity Saint David is rising to the challenge of delivering impactful learning to students and degree apprentices as we emerge from the long shadow cast over us by the pandemic.

I know that you have exciting and interesting ambitions to strengthen links with further education and higher-level technical qualifications, and I will say something about the importance of distinctiveness and collaboration a little later on.

But first, the, rather broad, title I've been given today is 'higher education in Wales'.

What I propose to cover instead today is a small, but significant, distinction.

I would like to focus on higher education in and for Wales.

It is an echo from the founding charter of the University of Wales. It says:

"there shall be and there is hereby constituted and founded a university in and for Wales"

- For both men and women to be eligible equally;
- For north, mid and south Wales; and
- For the advancement of the nation.

So whilst these days we might focus on

Widening access,

National well-being

And research impact,

There are ties that bind us to the grand ambitions of those working men and women that helped create higher education for Wales.

And the founding of St David's College two hundred years ago to give access to higher education for church ordinands in Lampeter was an example of a distinctive institution, educating citizens for the world – the world of the church in that example – and located where it was specifically given the distances- presumably by horse - from the other available institutions of Oxford and Cambridge.

And just as I am sure the ordinands of St David's college will have structure their sermons, I will draw on three themes today.

I am going to focus on:

- The importance of the distinctiveness of institutions as they operate within a national system;
- The importance of students as citizens, enabling them to grow as healthy, educated and employable citizens; and
- The importance of providers responsibilities to people and also to place, in particular after the pandemic.

Strategic duties

Two hundred years on we are embarking on a set of transformative reforms in Wales. I want to look at the role of higher education beyond the ambit of the tertiary education and research bill. But I want to start with the bill, which I took through its stage 2 proceedings last week and to thank those here who have been working so constructively with us on this.

The new strategic duties - the way in which we are putting our values and ambitions into law will guide the new commission, the sector and our institutions in focusing on the success and wellbeing of learners,

Of all ages,

Across all settings

And in all communities.

Core principles, values and ambitions right across higher education and the entire tertiary sector.

A renewed commitment to life-long learning;

A focus on wider participation and equality of opportunity

Global in outlook, with a clear civic mission;

Continuous improvement, competitive and collaborative research;

And an expansion of provision through the medium of Welsh building on the work of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol which celebrated its first 10 years last week.

And my message is this.

There is no get out of jail free card on any of this.

This vision, these duties apply to all parts of the tertiary sector – and I – and the commission – will expect all universities to deliver.

This is the first time we are putting the essence of Welsh tertiary education into law.

But this is not a straitjacket, it is a licence to innovate.

It gives you the tools to maintain and enhance institutional and sector quality

It reflects the best of what we have always valued.

It draws strength from our common roots -

Colleges founded by and for working men and women;

Locally proud but national and international in scope; and

Working with industry to advance innovation, technology and workforce skills.

A clear line of sight from the founding vision of higher education in Wales to the needs and opportunities of the 21st century and beyond.

Common roots – but now to be nurtured by a new national steward - the commission.

Differentiation

And turning then to those three themes I outlined in a moment ago.

Whilst we have common roots that commonality does not mean that each and every institution should conform, Ikea style, to the same structure, size and form.

Far from it.

Each and every university – and college – makes and will continue to make a significant contribution to our national goals and to national life in their own way.

But we need a further evolution of how we

Work together,

How we respect and indeed enhance our strengths and differences,

And how in doing so, we succeed nationally and internationally.

The commission will help institutions build on their own strengths and missions.

And at the same time, it will support each one to operate and complement each other as part of a whole sector approach.

Distinctive institutions, working in partnership., partnership between universities and between universities and other providers.

In getting this right, we can ensure:

Students, of all ages, with the widest possible access to the fullest learning and training opportunities possible;

That institution-based research and innovation works is part of a thriving national and international environment;

And that by being responsible and active in each community and region, we maximise the potential of all citizens, companies and communities.

As the national steward, the commission will respect autonomy.

We are legislating for that.

It will support institutional strengths, mission and delivery, whilst recognising that we all benefit from a system of strong complementary institutions.

In delivering for a wider range of learners, at different times in their careers and lives, we can work together for national prosperity and thriving communities.

Every one shares this responsibility.

But how that is delivered - to what extent, at what times, by who - will vary from institution to institution.

We must be bolder in recognising that Wales's tertiary education institutions vary and differ in many key aspects and in supporting that diversity.