



**Wise  
Cymru**

**Wise  
Wales**

# **Annual Report**

2016/2017



## Background to Wise Wales

Wise Wales is a cross-sector collaboration of Welsh education sector organisations working to:

***“Achieve meaningful partnership between educators, students’ unions and students across Wales”.***

### Higher education

In June 2014 the higher education sector in Wales launched the jointly developed statement of ‘Partnership for Higher Education in Wales’, at the first Partnership for Wales Conference. This statement aimed to explain three main points: the partnership between students, universities and students’ unions; how it looks in practice; and what can be done to promote partnership working across Wales. The release of this statement meant that Wales became the first UK nation to agree on a cross-sector commitment to partnership.

The aim of Wise Wales is to act as an advisory body offering opportunities and resources for institutions to develop and enhance their own partnership practices. It is there to support institutions, students and students’ unions, to move beyond simply student engagement towards partnership and then support their continuous development. The project recognises that the look and feel of partnership working will be unique to every university, and that partnership does not have an end point but is a continuously progressing practice. The project provides a unique umbrella overview of partnership within Wales and beyond and uses this oversight to better support each institution.

### The principles the work is based upon are:

- **Partnership:** Wise Wales should progress from talking about student engagement to partnership
- **Collaboration:** working together and sharing good practice, between both students’ unions and institutions, is key to creating a partnership approach.
- **Knowledge, skills and capacity:** Enhancing this throughout institutions and students’ unions.
- **Communication:** Promoting Wise Wales activities and impacts to the Government, public and wider sector.
- **Sustainability:** Working within a framework that can be maintained within the limitations of funding.



In 2016/17 Wise Wales' HE activity was funded through contributions from HEFCW and the nine higher education institutions in Wales. QAA and Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol are also partners in this work.

### **Further education**


The Welsh Government also funded Wise Wales in 2016/2017 to carry out a specific project in engaging further education students and institutions to develop learner voice structures. This project is partnered with Estyn and Colleges Wales.

A separate Interim Report solely focused on Wise Wales' further education work was produced in March 2017.

### **What do we mean by partnership?**

When we talk about a culture of partnership, we're referring to the practice of students having a joint say with their educational institution on the quality of the education provided. Partnership is about respecting and valuing the strengths of each collaborating party, agreeing upon mutual priorities, communicating effectively, and working together to reach a common goal.

Wise Wales believes every student is an expert in their own right and that everyone can bring a unique perspective to the table. By working in partnership with their institution, students can be helped to become active architects of their own educational experiences.



*"Achieve meaningful partnership between educators, students' unions and students across Wales"*



## Tailored support for HEIs and students' unions

The key feature of Wise Wales' work in 2016/17 was the continuation of the tailored support programme, first introduced in 2015/15 to provide support to each individual institution and students' unions in areas of student engagement and partnership that were priorities for them for the year ahead. This addition to the project plan came about as a result of the consultation on the project that was undertaken in early 2014 and the recommendations made in the resulting Interim Report.

The Wise Wales team met with staff and/or elected officers at all HE students' unions at the beginning of the academic year to identify which areas Wise Wales could offer support with. These were recorded and resources or advice sent to the institution as required. The meetings themselves were also opportunities to discuss current challenges facing staff with regards to partnership practices, and to explore ideas and solutions to these challenges.

Some of the specific areas in which Wise Wales offered support or advice to institutions and students' unions over the year include:

- Students as partners in curriculum design and assessment building
- Student-led teaching and learning strategy
- Developing online course representative training
- Mechanisms for gathering student feedback
- Sustaining representative engagement throughout the year
- Supporting representatives to engage with wider issues and education policy, not just matters relating to their course alone
- Code of conduct/practice for student representatives
- Including representative positions on HEAR transcripts
- Annual quality report and action planning with the institution following the creation of an annual quality report
- Training for academic staff on the role and value of student partnership

Y Talwrn (NUS Wales' summer training event for HE sabbatical officers) also featured a training session on student partnership and how the officers can make the most of working in partnership with their institution.

### Impact

Staff and officers from students' unions and institutions have previously noted the usefulness of this model of support as it caters to the differing needs of each individual institution, and ensures that the support is entirely relevant. It has enabled the Wise Wales team to work with students' unions and institutions on a diverse range of immediate priorities, and provide personalized advice and support to each member.



## **Future Development**

However, there is also a feeling that this work isn't the most effective form of support anymore, given both the needs of the sector and the capacity of the Wise Wales team. Therefore, it has been decided that from 2017/18 Wise Wales will shift the focus its work to concentrate on two key themes each year, decided upon in consultation with institutions and students' unions. Wise Wales will research and create development resources for each theme, and encourage institutions to work together to implement new initiatives. This work will replace the individual support currently provided, although ad hoc advice and guidance would still be offered as needed.

### **Pathways to Partnership toolkit**

Wise Wales has been encouraging HEIs and students' unions to complete the Pathways to Partnership toolkit. This allows individual institutions to analyse their own strengths and areas for development. Their results have also been compiled and aggregated to give a Wales-wide picture of strengths and weaknesses in student partnership practices. A summary of these results is provided as an appendix to this report.

These results will be used to help inform discussions around Wise Wales' key areas of work over the next few years, so that support can be targeted according to weaknesses across the sector.

At an institution level, staff and students' union members will be encouraged to revisit this toolkit annually so that they can track and monitor the development of their partnership culture. They will also continue to be encouraged to share these with Wise Wales so that a Wales-wide picture can be maintained, and any negative change addressed as a priority.

## **HE Staff Partnership Network**



Since June 2015, Wise Wales has been facilitating a network for staff in HE institutions and students' unions who have a remit for student voice, student engagement and partnership.

The network is staff-led, and intended to support members of staff who have a wealth of knowledge and experience essential for the development of partnership across Wales. It also recognises the fact that while elected officers and student representatives are in post for relatively short terms, staff provide the stability and continuity needed to continue to develop the partnership agenda.

The HE staff partnership network met twice during 2016/17, once in November and once in February. Network meetings feature a combination of workshops and guest speakers – selected according to the current interests of the group – and opportunities to discuss issues and share ideas and experiences.

The last meeting of the HE Staff Partnership Network was held alongside the Course Rep Conference in Wrexham on the 8th of February. The meeting was well attended, with over 20 staff members present, and was described as being 'useful' and 'informative' in feedback.

The workshops for the two meetings in 2016/17 included:

- HE sector developments and the role of student partnership, James Dunn and Fflur Elin, NUS Wales;
- What is student engagement? Rhys Dart, UWTSU and Cliona O'Neill, HEFCW;
- Effective student partnership case study, Danielle Barnard, Undeb Bangor and Jo Caulfield, Bangor University.

Many network members also attended the Partnership for Wales Conference and were given the opportunity to present on elements of their good practice.

### **Impact**

The network continues to provide an opportunity for staff from across Wales to share good practices, share ideas, and build a specific network in the area of partnership. This is helping to develop more effective partnership activities at each individual institution, whilst also supporting the raising of quality across Wales. Before the network there was no specific forum in Wales to do this.

### **Future Development**

In 2017/2018, it is proposed that the HE Staff Network will play a more central role in the project, acting as interest groups linked to each of the key themes, with members responsible for driving implementation work in their respective institutions.



## Course Representative Conference

The Course Representative Conference is aimed at course representatives and other learner representatives from across HE and FE. It is an opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge, alongside networking and sharing experiences and ideas.

The Wise Wales Course Rep Conference took place in Wrexham Glyndwr and Coleg Cambria on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. This was the first year that the conference was split into a HE conference and a FE conference, in response to feedback that the content needed to be better tailored to the needs of both sets of delegates.

At the HE Conference at Glyndŵr SU, delegates focused on building effective campaigns on their campuses, and using their positions to raise their voices for an Inclusive Education. There were sessions given by Rob Samuel from Undeb Bangor, NUS Wales President Fflur Elin, and Wise Wales Coordinator Daniel Roberts.

There were also opportunities during both conferences for attendees to reflect on their own experiences, and work together to identify solutions to challenges they face in their roles.

The HE Course Rep Conference was well-reviewed, with each aspect of the day from registration to content being given at least 5 out of 6 by attendees. A particular highlight was the networking opportunities available, while something to work on for the future may be improving the information provided before the event itself so that delegates have a better idea of what to expect before arriving.

### Impact

Benefits from attending this conference, as reported by attendees on feedback forms, included increased confidence in carrying out their roles as representatives, better understanding of how course representatives could be involved in enhancing practices as well as reporting on current issues, and how they could work more effectively with other representatives.

Many representatives also stated that they felt their leadership abilities had improved as a result of the conference, and that they were returning to their institutions with a renewed confidence and enthusiasm.



## Partnership for Wales Conference

The Partnership for Wales Conference is now in its fourth year, and is aimed at students' unions sabbatical officers and relevant students' union and institutional staff.

Partnership for Wales Conference 2017 was held on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Based on feedback and suggestions from previous events, the theme of the conference was 'Celebrating and Showcasing Good Practice in Wales', and colleges and universities were encouraged to run workshops showcasing their student partnership work over the past year.

The day-long event was attended by approximately 40 staff and officers from 11 HE and FE students' unions, institutions and education sector bodies across Wales, and featured a range of workshops and sessions on a variety of topics. The conference was designed to offer an opportunity to develop skills and knowledge concerning partnership, with an emphasis on sharing experiences and good practice, allowing delegates to develop ideas for future improvement.

Sessions included:

- An opening keynote speech from Professor Cara Aitchison, Vice-Chancellor; Brad Woolridge, Students' Union President and Will Fuller, Students' Union Vice-President at Cardiff Metropolitan Students' Union
- A second keynote from Joan O'Mahony, HEA
- Students' union engagement with fee and access plans – HEFCW
- Embedding student voice in teaching – Cardiff University Students' Union
- Speak week – Cardiff University Students' Union
- Ensuring robust academic representation – Swansea University Students' Union
- Student Engagement at City and Islington College – City and Islington College
- Learner voice at Coleg Sir Gâr – Coleg Sir Gâr
- Using focus groups to affect change – Adult Learning Wales
- HE policy update – NUS Wales
- Running a FE SU – NUS Wales

Wise Wales also ran two sessions discussing key themes and trends identified from the Pathways to Partnership toolkit (HE), and sharing good practice identified during the FE Pathways to Partnership project.

Feedback was on the whole very positive, with an average 4/5 score for satisfaction with the event and the benefits of attending, and a number of delegates commenting on the usefulness of the event. The sessions delivered by Welsh SUs and City and Islington College's session were particularly well reviewed as being informative and useful, and for offering ideas that delegates felt they could take back and implement at their institutions.





Improvements identified for future conferences include a clearer plan of supporting the implementation of ideas and practice shared at the conference, to ensure that the conference has a longer-term impact with regards to student partnership in Wales.

### **Impact**

Benefits from attending this conference, as reported by attendees on feedback forms, included learning about initiatives in place at other universities, colleges and students' unions, and being able to take away ideas from these sessions to explore and implement in their own institution. This will be followed up with institutions in the 2017/18 annual liaison visits so that the outcome and longer-term impact of taking away these ideas can be recorded.



## **Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol: representative training and support**

Wise Wales has been working closely with Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, providing consultative support to ensure that the student voice is strong and effective within Y Coleg's internal representative system.

In addition to this, Wise Wales provided training for two cohorts of Y Coleg Cymraeg's Academic Board student representatives. Training sessions were focussed on being an effective representative, both in committee meetings and on their campuses. Topics included leadership, public speaking, meeting skills and how to engage fellow students in issues that matter to them.

### **Impact**

The ongoing partnership between Wise Wales and Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol helps ensure that students play a pivotal role in the short and long term development of Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and Welsh-medium education.

Student representatives who attended the training sessions felt better equipped with the skills they need to effectively represent their peers, engage fully with their role on the Academic Board and play a key role in setting the agenda for the future of Y Coleg.



## Sector events and networks

Wise Wales has attended and presented at a variety of cross sector events throughout 2016/2017. This is an integral part of the activity, as it supports the continuing communication with the wider sector, as well as the promotion of the project. It also ensures that the project is collecting good practice and ideas from Wales and beyond to support our members' partnership development.

A summary of the events and networks which Wise Wales attended:

- Quality Matters 2016
- RAISE Special Interest Partnership Group meetings
- RAISE Annual Conference 2016
- International Colloquium on Partnership
- REACT Conference 2017
- HEA What Works? Final Conference
- Colleges Wales Principals' Network
- FEstival of Skills and Education

### Impact

Attending events such as those listed above is considered a key method of ensuring that Wise Wales is fully informed regarding new research and successful initiatives relating to student partnership. Knowledge gained at such events can then be shared with Wise Wales' networks in order to enhance practices in Wales, and speakers from the events are invited to give workshops at Wise Wales events.

## Additional HE Activity

Wise Wales and HECFW will shortly be publishing a leaflet offering a snapshot of the good practice case studies received from institutions in response to HEFCW's call for case studies from institutions and students' unions on how they engage with their 'hard to reach' groups of students. This leaflet focusses on the three groups of students that featured prominently across most responses: distance learners, care leavers, and students with caring responsibilities. The document is intended to provide a snapshot of the initiatives and efforts in place across Wales.

Wise Wales fed into the consultation on the new Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Review, and will be working with QAA to identify how Wise Wales can support HEIs to work in partnership with their students during the review process.



### **Next steps**

2017/18 will bring some significant changes to Wise Wales, with the shift in focus to key themes of work replacing the current tailored support programme, and with the current staff network and conferences being linked in with these themes rather than being standalone activity.

This process will begin with the development of a new strategic plan for Wise Wales, which will be co-created alongside the Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching Group, students' union officers and student engagement/voice staff members from across Wales.