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| **Trade Unions and employers  liaison group meeting**  15 July 2025 at 15:00 – 16:30 via  Microsoft Teams | A green and black logo  Description automatically generated, Picture |

**Attendees:** Keiron Rees (Chair), Marian Jebb, Hedd Boyles (minutes), Ewen Brierley, Gareth Lloyd, Amanda Wilkinson, Alyson Watkins, Claire Armitstead, Menai Jones, Gwennan Schiavone, Nicola Savage, Lisa Mytton, Iona Davies, Lynne Hackett, Karen Higgins, Kelly Edwards, Karen Morgan, Zenny Saunders, Sharon Davies

**Apologies:** Karron Williams, Rhian Edwards, Michaela Gilroy, Laura Doel, Daniel Maney.

**Action Log**

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| Ref | Action | Assigned |
| 2.0 | MJ to amend the draft terms of reference to improve clarity of terminology, particularly on points raised during the discussion. MJ to circulate amongst the group for further review, comments and approval. | MJ |
| 2.1 | MJ to create a forward planner for future meetings to enable co-construction of future agendas. MJ to circulate amongst the group. | MJ |

**Minutes**

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| **1.** | **Welcome and introductions** |  |
|  | The chair welcomed all members to the first Trade Unions and employers liaison group meeting. Apologies were received from Karron Williams, Rhian Edwards (Medr), Michaela Gilroy (Unite), Laura Doel (NAHT) and Daniel Maney (NEU).  KR noted that Rhian Edwards will chair of the group for future meetings. |  |
| **2.** | **Draft terms of reference** |  |
|  | MJ introduced the draft terms of reference to the group as an initial attempt to define the group’s aim and purpose, focusing on Medr’s policy development on a tertiary level and ensuring effective engagement with trade unions and employers in developing strategic decisions. The group is not intended to replace existing forums, but to complement them by enabling early and joined-up strategic discussion.  It was proposed that the meeting frequency of the group will take place on a termly basis, initially on teams with the potential for face-to-face meetings if agreed by the group. MJ noted that future meetings would be scheduled much further in advance to give members of the group greater notice and plan around everyone’s availability.  One member of the group raised a query on item 2 of the draft terms of reference regarding communication of major changes/decisions to the tertiary sector. The member requested clarification on the expectation that such updates are provided to this group ahead of wider announcements. MJ acknowledged the ambiguity, explained that the wording was meant to refer to the representative bodies on this group rather than the tertiary sector as a whole, and agreed to revise the wording for greater clarity.  Another member recommended implementing a review period or timeline for revisiting standing items and meeting topics, to ensure relevance amid Medr’s implementation and upcoming consultations. MJ agreed to remove the ‘forward look’ item from the draft terms of reference and introduce a forward planner for meetings to enable co-construction of future agendas based on group suggestions, sector developments and Medr’s input.  One member of group addressed the position of the group and asserted that this space is not a negotiation forum, nor a space for formal agreements and stressed that existing negotiation mechanisms remain valid across education sectors. MJ recognised the position of the group and reaffirmed that the group has been formed to advise on the workforce impacts of Medr’s development of policies and strategies. It is not intended as a forum for negotiation or collective bargaining.  MJ encouraged all members to contribute their feedback and share thoughts on the proposed draft terms of reference, as the group continues to evolve. The draft terms of reference will be reviewed on a regular basis.  **Action:** MJ to amend the draft terms of reference to improve clarity of terminology, particularly on points raised during the discussion. MJ to circulate amongst the group for further review and approval.  **Action:** MJ to create a forward planner for future meetings to enable co-construction of future agendas. MJ to circulate amongst the group. |  |
| **3.** | **Update on Medr’s Regulatory Consultation** |  |
|  | EB provided an update on the position of Medr’s Regulatory Consultation and noted that Medr is in its first phase of formal consultation, with a second phase scheduled for later this year. It was noted that Medr is currently consulting on a number of aspects of the new system including conditions of funding and registration for HE providers.  The consultation also covers the Quality Framework which applies to all tertiary providers including school sixth forms, and the next phase will include the remaining conditions, including the Learner Engagement Code. It was shared that most documents are in draft, but not ready for public sharing. The final versions will balance consistency and sector-wide applicability and will be structured to show how everything fits together.  EB noted that Medr’s monitoring approach is intended to be proportionate and risk-based, for instance financial sustainability will attract greater scrutiny due to high impact. It was shared that Medr is aware of the sector anxiety around the added layers of compliance and are working hard to ensure that the monitoring processes do not require a huge degree of burden. EB reiterated that Medr is not looking to add new layers of work onto what providers are already doing. A concrete example of this is removing fee and access plans after 2026/27 and the application process for registration is being designed with simplicity in mind. EB noted that institutions will be expected to assure their own compliance internally. Intervention will be based on clear triggers, like when something goes wrong or changes.  One member of the group noted that provider staff including finance teams, clerks and governing body support staff are concerned about the heavy workload expected when the final regulatory proposals are presented to the sector, especially given the short turnaround time and simultaneous institutional changes such as budget planning and funding announcements. The member highlighted the risk of over burdening these colleagues, whilst another member echoed the same concern noting the impact on institutional leadership and the need to avoid disrupting their focus on teaching and learning. The member adds that volunteer governors may struggle to engage with the complexity of the new system during this busy period.  EB thanked members of the group in sharing their insights and acknowledged the pressure felt by some institutions, volunteers and members of staff. EB noted that Medr is actively planning to avoid overlapping demands and emphasised the possibility of phasing in or deferring non-essential elements and stress the flexibility to evolve certain regulatory conditions over time. EB shared that some legislative deadlines are fixed and beyond Medr’s control, but internal iterations are feasible.  MJ noted that some of the trade unions represented at the meeting had either submitted or were expected to submit consultation responses. Medr’s Learner Engagement and Workforce team will take on the responsibility of collating information from the submissions, with a particular focus on the impact to the workforce within the sector. The analysis will contribute to the broader review of all consultation responses and is expected to support future discussions by identifying specific issues, concerns or impacts raised from a workforce perspective in the trade union feedback. |  |
| **4.** | **Promoting collaboration conference outcomes and next steps (paper 2)** |  |
|  | MJ provided an update on the recent conference, held in line with Medr’s strategic duty under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act to promote collaboration between tertiary education providers and trade unions.  The event focused on the FE and HE sector bringing together trade unions both on a national and local representative level, alongside representation from stakeholders and institutional leaders. Case studies were shared by Coleg Cambria and Coleg y Cymoedd, and most of the day was devoted to workshop sessions that explored benefits, opportunities, challenges and emerging priorities. The feedback from these sessions was highly constructive, generating a clear practical list for the next stage of work.  It was noted that despite some challenges in trade union outreach and sectoral engagement, the conference received positive feedback from a range of trade union representatives, FE and HE institutions and the Minister for Further and Higher Education. As part the next steps, building on conference insights and sector feedback, Medr will be developing a draft specification in preparation to procure a tender that will help develop an ongoing programme of support for the tertiary sector. It was noted that Medr aims to prepare a draft specification by the Autumn which will be shared amongst members of the group for feedback.  One member noted that the invite to future conferences should be extended to all trade unions to avoid disappointment amongst colleagues, as feedback demonstrated that some trade unions felt that they had been left out from the event. Another member raised the suggestion of brining the conference forward in the year to ensure senior leaders can attend next year’s event, as they typically take annual leave during June to ensure they are back for the summer break period. Members of the group reiterated they had received positive feedback from colleagues, with a number highlighting that the approach of the conference was highly valued and that it is important to keep the momentum going within this space. |  |
| **5.** | **Medr budget timeline for 2026-27** |  |
|  | GH provided members of the group with an overview of the 2026-27 budget. GH apologised for the delay in Medr’s budget publication which outlines details of budget allocations for the tertiary sector. This is due to delays in translation and the challenges of turning what was historically a HEFCW circular for HE allocations, into a full tertiary allocations paper. Medr is aiming to issue the final publication by the end of July 2025.  GH shared that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance had announced that the budget timetable is coming forward due to the upcoming Senedd elections with the anticipation of an October draft budget announcement, which is 3 months earlier than expected. It is anticipated that the Welsh Government (WG) will publish the final budget in December 2025. GH noted that Medr will aim to publish its institutional funding allocations in March 2026, with Medr’s final publication scheduled to be issued in April 2026. GH will ensure that members of this group are kept up to date with any changes or important information, with the suggestion of keeping budgetary information and funding as a standard agenda item going forward.  GH shared as part of Medr’s strategic and operational plan there will be a funding consultation going ahead in December 2025, which aims to consult with the sector on the high-level operating principles of the funding methodology. GH noted that the proposals of this consultation will be shared with Medr’s Board towards the end of July and would be worth running a session with members of the group to discuss this consultation in detail and understand the impact this may have on the workforce and institutions.  One member raised their concern regarding the current timetable of Medr’s proposed consultations and the impact this may have on both staff and workload, resulting in multiple demands on staff occurring simultaneously. It was understood that teams were expected to engage with the regulatory framework whilst also handing initial funding allocations, creating significant operational strain amongst the workforce. Further clarity is needed to understand how this would be managed. |  |
| **6.** | **Agenda items for future meetings** |  |
|  | KR noted the proposed agenda items for future meetings which included:   * Updates on Medr developments including policy and funding * Items proposed by trade unions * Items proposed by provider representative bodies * Condition of registration and funding on staff and student welfare   One member noted the need to include professional learning and leadership as an agenda item for future meetings. MJ confirmed that this item will be included for discussion at the next meeting, and to get in touch if anyone had additional items they would like to include in the Autum meeting. |  |
| **7.** | **Any other business (AOB)** |  |
|  | No AOB was raised. Future meeting dates will be circulated in due course alongside any follow-up actions as a result of this meeting. |  |