

# Summary of Feedback on the Report from the WUN Working Group on Undergraduate Education

## 1. Background

At the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), the Partnership Board had embraced a recommendation that the WUN mission be enlarged to include undergraduate education and invited Prof. Peter Lennie from the University of Rochester to put together a proposal for the Board's further deliberation. Prof. Lennie set up a working group for the proposal which consisted of representatives from eight member universities. A consultation session was held with personnel from student mobility offices of member universities. The report was submitted to the Partnership Board in early December 2017. Please refer to attachment A for the Report of WUN Working Group on Undergraduate Education.

Feedback on the Report from the WUN Working Group on Undergraduate Education was solicited during March and April from the WUN Coordinators as well as personnel responsible for student mobility and international education at member universities. This paper attempts to summarize feedback provided by representatives from 16<sup>1</sup> member universities.

The report recommends that WUN invests in three initiatives at this stage. They include:

- a) Providing grants to faculty to engage groups of advanced undergraduate students in research project (pages 3-4 of report).
- b) Running summer schools that introduce undergraduates to research problems (page 4 of report).
- c) Establishing consortium wide exchanges (pages 6-7 of report).

WUN Coordinators and student mobility personnel were invited to comment on the recommendations, focusing on three main questions:

- a) Would you be supportive of the initiatives proposed? If so, which one(s) and what benefits do you think it would bring to your university and/or WUN?
- b) Would you support and be confident that resources would be provided by your university for the initiatives? Please state which initiative, if relevant. Please note the required resources is estimated at (page 8 of report):
  - Faculty-supervised research for undergraduates – £15K-£30K
  - Research summer school – £15K-£25K
  - Student support for both above – £35K-£52K
  - Admin/HR support for above and consortium based exchange – £75K-£85K
- c) Please share why you feel some initiatives (if any) may be difficult to implement.

## 2. Summary

Most respondents generally supported a program of faculty-supervised research projects for advanced undergraduate and the summer schools focused on research problems. Both proposals would provide distinctive alternatives to the regular year or semester long study abroad opportunities which many member universities are already running as well as deepen research engagements among member universities. There was no positive feedback received directly for the consortium based exchange.

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<sup>1</sup> National Cheng Kung University, University College Dublin, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, University of Alberta, University of Bergen, University of Bristol, University of Cape Town, University of Ghana, University of Leeds, University of Southampton, University of York, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The University of Auckland, The University of Sheffield, The University of Sydney, and The University of Western Australia.

### **3. Faculty-supervised Research Projects for Undergraduates**

The faculty-supervised research projects for undergraduates would add value to WUN's existing initiatives (which is focused on research). However, the respondents also alerted to the practicality of an individual researcher or project hosting a group of 10 students as presented in the proposal. Existing programs at the University of Alberta and University of Leeds place at most two students with each researcher. At CUHK a larger group of around four students may be placed under one researcher. Respondents also cautioned underestimation of effort and resources required to run such a program. There is a suggestion that the undergraduate research opportunities could be connected to an existing summer school to leverage on existing resources and systems.

### **4. Research Summer School**

There is some support for the Research Summer School as it would raise the relevance and profile of WUN within the university. It would serve as a good platform to bring together students from across the network and should lead to some interesting learning environments. However, those with experience in offering summer schools are skeptical of the estimated cost presented. Besides since the Research Summer School would rotate among members, there needs to be some certainty on members who would have the capacity and expertise to run such an initiative. One respondent raised the possibility of having WUN sponsor a course based summer school as most undergraduates at her university have relatively less experience in research.

### **5. Consortium Based Exchange**

There was no positive feedback received directly for the consortium based exchange. Strong partnerships for bilateral student exchanges already exist between many members of the Network and many respondents feel they have sufficient partnerships and programs in place to meet the needs of their university and students.

In reality those who would benefit from the proposal would be those who are able to send as well as attract students. Inability to do both and on a balanced basis would not benefit from a consortium based exchange.

Those with experience and responsibility for student mobility at their home institution shared difficulties with consortium based exchange, especially one that is created for a small group of universities. Students would not be attracted by the program due to uncertainty in placement in their choice of program, compared to other bilateral exchanges. Since those who apply for the consortium based exchange would not be guaranteed their preferred destination, they will run a risk of losing the opportunity to pick from the wider opportunities provided by the student mobility office at their home university. Besides, consortium based exchanges are time consuming and difficult to manage.

Instead of setting up consortium based exchange, it was recommended that student mobility offices should be encouraged establish working groups and other collaborative groups to explore and advance any agreed projects that support undergraduate mobility.

## 6. Funding

Funding was a major concern for respondents. Some respondents felt the proposed costings are too high. Some stressed the ability to opt out of the proposed programs and hence not be required to share the cost.

If a centrally funded pot of money was to be collected for the programs, then equal access to the opportunities should be provided to all contributing members. The current proposal suggests that funding is not provided to all participants. However, given the range of opportunities available and the costs, funding for all participants should be available to attract and make participation possible.

Others are willing to set aside funding to support their students' participation but not to pay towards a central pot.

## 7. Other Remarks

Other remarks were provided which is worth noting. In order to ensure the **sustainability** of these programs, it is best that the programs be part of the host university's offering to its regular and other visiting students.

In developing the proposals, it is important to engage the **student mobility personnel** at each member university to ensure the proposals are sound and feasible.

Given the very diverse universities represented in the consortium and the very many differing views raised, it is essential that individual universities are given the opportunity to **opt-in or opt-out** of the proposed programs as they see fit and only participating universities should pay for the programs.

Shally Fan, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 23 April 2018

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## **Individual Response to Report of WUN Working Group on Undergraduate Education**

### **1. University A**

Regarding the “Report of WUN working group on undergraduate education”, I have one question and one comment. The first question is about summer school. I was wondering if there is any particular reason that summer school is focusing on research. I think it is a great idea for our undergraduates to be familiar with research study. However, would it be possible for WUN to also sponsor the teaching program? I think this way we can attract more students since most undergraduates have relative less experience in research.

My other comment is about course access beyond and across the network. This report pointed out a lot of essential issues for WUN to develop its own MOOCs. In my humble opinion, I am not the expert in this area so I am not sure if MOOCs would still be the trend in future higher education and worth the investment. On the other hand, as mentioned in the report, many universities offer distance learning and online degree programs. We can have a collection of distance learning programs that was preexisted in our partner university and establish a concept such as “WUN University”.

### **2. University B**

I'm pleased to confirm that my university is broadly supportive of the research-related student proposals in the Report (cf. grants to faculty to engage students in research projects, and thematic research summer schools). However, at this point, we are not supportive of the proposal to establish consortium exchange across the network, as our principal rationale for joining this network relates to research engagement with other members.

We are interested to know how any new initiatives might be funded and what alternative costings might be developed by WUN in response to feedback from the members (cf. only partial support for the full suite of recommendations in the Report). At first sight, we are concerned, for example, at the proposal to establish an additional full-time position in the Secretariat. We are also interested to know whether there might be an opportunity for members to opt in or out of a new strand of student-related activity.

### **3. University C**

As you probably know, we are currently facing a transition period at my university. Discussions on strategic initiatives and resources provision will need to be looked at more carefully.

Another important aspect that might influence these discussions is the upcoming release of information on the new government scheme to fund universities' internationalization. As my university is seeing WUN's member institutions as strategic partners in the programme, considerations on financing possibilities would be connected to that. In view of this singular scenario in which we find ourselves, we will probably be able to give feedback on this subject later. I hope it doesn't pose major problems for you, in a context of network resolutions.

#### **4. University D**

At the conclusion of the working group's deliberations we had indicated our willingness to support the full proposal and are prepared to continue to do so. In our final response to the working group we had offered our support with a strong preference for seeing the research internship component developed, and in a manner that facilitated the broadest participation of students and professors. This remains what we see as the strongest element in the proposal and we hope that the proposed model can be a starting point and that in time a more robust program can be developed. We see greater impact of the individual placement models that we have established at my university and that I believe you have at CUHK than the NSF model proposed. We are far less keen on the summer schools and remain skeptical of the value of the consortium exchange model.

During the working groups deliberations there was thought that WUN might have existing funds that could be repurposed to meet some of the financial requirements of the proposal. There was also discussion that individual universities could opt out of the consortium exchange model. Given that the full cost of the proposal might need to be borne by additional membership fees it would be important to clarify if there is a range of participation with corresponding fees - or if it will be an all or nothing requirement.

We have not yet explored how the additional funds would be secured at my university. Depending on our ability to secure these additional funds, and the possibility to elect to participate in certain elements and not others, we would again prioritize the research internships and depending on resources may elect not to participate in the consortium exchange.

Do you anticipate moving forward with seeking approval of the program and an additional fee assessment to members at the upcoming AGM? If there is a concrete proposal/motion that is being discussed - especially if it has an implication for increased fees it would be great to have this in advance so that we can ensure we have had the appropriate discussions internally to know how the additional fees will be covered such that we are in a position to endorse the full proposal. We had given a heads up to our senior team about this several months ago but if there is a concrete proposal with respect to increased membership fees, it would be good to have this detail so we can do the appropriate consultations at my University.

#### **5. University E**

Personally I think the best solution would be to connect a UG student research experience to an existing Summer School for research (target group graduate students/junior researchers). For instance by extending the Summer School with a special designed programme for UG students. Then you could use most of the Summer School resources that are already in place. Maybe there could be a small amount of WUN central money to apply for on annual basis (in conjunction with the RDF call?) to establish and run a special UG student research programme at the Summer School for the first time. Funding/Scholarship for the UG students to travel and participate in the Summer School's UG student research programme should be the responsibility of each WUN institution and/or student.

#### **6. University F**

My university's Global Opportunities are supportive of any initiatives that help to develop high quality academic student mobility for undergraduates particularly for short-term and/or research programmes that provide alternatives to a year or semester studying abroad. It is this mobility

that we need to increase and have some institutional involvement in if we are to reach our target of 30% mobility by 2023. Traditionally mobility has remained very separate from research but with proposals such as this we have a unique ability to try and bridge that gap. However WUN is primarily a group who have come together out of shared research interests and therefore mobility has not necessarily been a consideration. There are many synergies between our exchange partners and WUN partners and it makes sense to leverage these where we can but with the recognition that some will never be suitable for exchange.

With this in mind WUN should support developing student mobility between its members with a focus on research. The faculty-supervised research projects are an excellent idea and could also help to support postgraduate recruitment at the same time. I am unsure how well research staff and groups would support the project and gaining their input would be vital to make this work.

I am less sure about summer schools as there is an enormous amount of work involved in designing and developing a summer school. As an institution I don't think that we could commit to hosting one for a single year unless we were using it as an opportunity to trial the programme with a view to opening it up in future years for general international recruitment. This is definitely something we could explore as it is an area we are developing at the moment. To persuade UG students to attend the summer school some element of funding would be necessary whether through a subsidised programme or institutions providing stipends for their own students to attend.

The consortium based approach is that only initiative that we would find difficult to support. It is very hard to get an exchange consortium to work – we have had success when it links to a very specific subject area e.g. Liberal Arts and in these cases I think that a network can add a considerable amount of value. However in a broader context you will find that there are net senders and net receivers. Most likely we would be a net receiver and would generally want to send to net receivers. Multiplied across the network you clearly have an unworkable model as any institution will want to balance numbers of incoming and outgoing students. There are also logistical difficulties in mapping application dates and times and I could not see a reason that our students would apply through a WUN consortium when they are likely to have far more certainty with our bilateral exchange partnerships. I can see that WUN wants to make itself more relevant to its members but by repositioning itself as an exchange network in addition to a research one it is at risk of trying to appeal to too many. In many institutions WUN does not have engagement from their mobility offices and a consortium approach would be short-lived.

Resource is a separate issue and the International Office has no funds available to support WUN mobility. This is something that would require further discussion.

In conclusion I would like to see WUN support undergraduate research mobility. I think the report underestimates the impact and reach that this can have across an institution. I think there is a risk that many WUN institutions do not work closely with their mobility teams and for this to work a WUN mobility group needs to be set up to ensure you have the right stakeholders involved.

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Clearly a lot of time and attention has gotten to develop such a detailed set of proposals, and this should be commended. There are some interesting and ambitious ideas presented. Of the proposals put forward, my favourite is the notion of competitive grants to run UG research summer schools. These should bring together students from across the network, and should lead to some interesting learning environments.

I am not supportive of providing member institutions with grants to help offset the costs of sending students to such summer schools. The vast majority of our universities already have student mobility funding that can be allocated towards such initiatives if we feel that they are an institutional priority. I appreciate that some of our members in the developing world may not have

access to the same quantum of mobility funding, but the solution is not to spend central network budgets supporting it. I am not in favour of establishing central network administrative posts to support mobility initiatives. We (almost) all have specialist offices that deal with student mobility issues. We should encourage those offices to establish working groups and other collaborative groups to advance any agreed projects rather than hiring new people centrally. I am also not in favour of spending meaningful amounts of time and effort trying to establish a multi-institution “clearinghouse” model of network-wide exchanges. Every university network that I have been part of has had the same ambition, and the complexity of making it work administratively has been prohibitive. I’m not saying that I don’t think that WUN is incapable of solving this particular puzzle, but I’m also not convinced that solving this puzzle is the real prize that will unlock meaningful additional UG mobility. In summary, then, I am supportive of the idea of competitive grants to run pilot projects in order to unlock innovation and establish models of best practice.

## **7. University G**

My university is in principle committed to support the WUN undergraduate mobility proposal. However, due to the serious funding crisis we face, we had to implement measures to curb costs which includes revisiting our budget. We are therefore not in a position to participate in this initiative at this stage but we fully agree to the significance of it.

## **8. University H**

- a) Would you be supportive of the initiatives proposed? If so, which one(s) and what benefits do you think it would bring to your university and/or WUN?

My university supports the initiative because it will promote undergraduate learning and research and deepens faculty exchange at all levels.

- b) Would you support and be confident that resources would be provided by your university for the initiatives? Please state which initiative, if relevant. Please note the required resources is estimated at:

- Undergraduate research – £15K-£30K
- Summer school – £15K-£25K
- Student support for both above – £35K-£52K
- Admin/HR support for above and consortium based exchange – £75K-£85K

My university agrees to the above support.

- c) Please share why you feel some initiatives (if any) may be difficult to implement.

None.

## **9. University I**

Many thanks for sending such an excellent overview of the WUN proposition for student mobility. My observations are as follows:

I agree with the narrower focus on specific activities rather than the development of co-branded courses.

With the specific proposals:

- Grants for faculty to engage students in research projects  
Our limited UG research activity is through our partnership with two other universities. In both cases projects are put forward by academics and promoted to students. Rarely has there been more than one student assigned to a research project (maximum of 2). I am therefore unsure of the capability of faculty staff to host around 10 students either across thematically relevant disciplines or a single project. I would question whether projects supporting 10 students may be more akin to a training/summer school type activity. As this has not been tested I am unsure about how popular it will be with faculty. However across the partners the proposal seeks only to identify two projects so it may be an approach already operating at other partner institutions. The financial incentive to faculty is positive but it should be recognised that, beyond the academic structure for the projects, the administration will fall on others to enable the students to take part including visa support, accommodation, social elements of the programme etc. Overall my question would be the viability of hosting such large numbers but I understand the desire to have a controlled small-scale pilot. I agree that there should be a student subsidy to take part. I would note that over a 6 week period a grant of £1,000 would potentially not address the aim to ensure that students from lower income families could afford to participate. I think, as mentioned, there would potentially be the need for sending institutions to further incentivise.
- Summer Schools  
My university currently delivers a summer school slightly above the top end of the proposed pilot (circa 110). This is not a research based summer school but is credit bearing. It runs over 4 weeks and is managed by 2 full time staff, 6 student assistants and 19 academic tutors. This is a high quality international experience with embedded field trips, social programme and accommodation. The cost is circa £3,000 per student. It would be useful to know if the costing model proposed is based on the actual costs that UWA had in developing their summer school for WUN. The investment cost up front would inevitably determine the level of cost to students to participate. I agree with the subsidy for students. Students at my university can take part in subsidised overseas summer schools (tuition fee waiver) and for the WUN summer school to be popular the incentive would need to be similar to be seen as a viable option. As a potentially rotating offer partners would need to be reassured they have the expertise and the capacity to build a one-off summer school.
- Student Exchange  
We have strong exchange links with 12 of the WUN partners and do not have agreements with others based on potentially being unable to generate reciprocal demand. The numbers with the current partners are healthy and we would have some concern about ensuring we could maintain these numbers in any other scheme. Given that we have bi-lateral agreements in place I'm not so sure this would be a priority. We are also part of GE3 and there is a risk that students are not placed. As we run study abroad selection we would be unable to guarantee a WUN place so the student may lose the opportunity to pick from our wider network of opportunities. GE3 however is a useful addition for our Engineering mobility and we have relatively small numbers accessing study abroad through this route.

(a) Would you be supportive of the initiatives proposed? If so, which one(s) and what benefits do you think it would bring to your university and/or WUN?

As above – I believe the research exchanges and summer schools would perhaps offer a more distinctive offer. The relatively focused initiatives could generate sufficient interest from across the partnership. I would suggest hosting such large numbers on a research project may be prohibitive.

(b) Would you support and be confident that resources would be provided by your university for the initiatives? Please state which initiative, if relevant.

Across 23 partners if the contributions were equal this would equate to £192k so £8,300 per partner. I could not categorically say whether investment would be available but it is not a particularly large funding requirement. I should note that the bulk of this is for the consortium exchange which I see less value if based on our current exchange operation.

## **10. University J**

We are concerned about the funding model and feel that much of the activity could be funded by our own internal resources. If we do go for a centrally funded pot then we would have to make sure that each institution is given the same access to all the programmes ie 2 places per institution.

We have some concern regarding the Faculty grants for running projects for research experience and summer schools. We feel that whilst the grants would be useful, these initiatives should be sustainable and where possible be part of the Institution's offering to all students, not just those identified as part of the WUN specific programme.

Consortium wide exchanges is very difficult considering that we are not working to a standard offering across the board and some institutions are capable of more than others.

I feel the salary allowed for the Admin support is somewhat excessive unless of course they are administering other programmes that we are not aware of.

## **11. University K**

I think the document is comprehensive in both its considerations and in identifying potential issues with the initiatives proposed. These are my thoughts, in no particular order.

- My preference would be to start with a fully funded pilot summer school of 2 / 3 weeks on research problems with a specific theme of global relevance in a location which will appeal to the widest group of students. It would really raise the relevance and profile of the network within the university.
- The promotion of a distinct brand needs to be centrally managed and it would be good to have materials and launch events in each uni. Making the networking opportunity the key focus would I believe attract more students and provide an external identity to the cohort. What makes this WUN programme distinct is that you meet other WUN students rather than staying in a group of students from my university.
- There are many other summer opportunities for students to gain experience which do not require large outlays of time or money. There is certainly a perception within the student population that international summer schools and research projects are seen as "nice to have" projects which attract those who can afford to pay for them and not work during vacations. We need to promote the value and skills that students would gain from this programme very clearly and make sure we have enough funding to support any student who is selected.
- Realistically, the location, theme and funding offer needs to be decided straight away in order to get events and deadlines in institutional calendars for AY2018/19.

Considerations:

- I would agree that doing any of this is only feasible with the support of a dedicated central WUN mobility support officer.
- Our office resources are already overwhelmed with the increased workload involved in promoting, supporting and funding mobility programmes for a relatively small number of students and the consortium exchange would probably be most time consuming and difficult to manage.

- We do already have issues with reciprocity and so I think the consortium exchange would be hard to manage. A number of institutions already have exchanges and it seemed that the group at EAIE expressed the concern that not all programmes would be equally attractive and experience shows that even if a student provides three choices, they usually only want to go to one place and will drop out if they don't get accepted. It would put huge pressure on some institutions and may cause unease between network partners.
- Credit bearing programmes (ref; exchanges/research) are time consuming for faculty involved and potentially academically risky for students who are replacing studies at home e.g. grade conversions and learning outcomes being assessed out of context could potentially alter final degree classifications.
- Running larger programmes (ref; REU) would also be costly in terms of finding faculty projects, selection and preparation of students so central administration would need to have significant experience to be able to handle this on behalf of the institutions involved.
- We have seen a definite rise in the proportion of students who drop out of summer programmes when they are told they have not received a bursary to support them so we must be careful to have either enough bursaries to cover all selected students, or enough fee paying students to support the viability of the programme without causing the host / WUN to have to subsidise. I'm thinking here of minimum numbers for programmes in terms of fixed costs such as teaching, accommodation, flights etc.
- We are looking at a very small window for the programme to run in, given the difference in term times between northern and southern hemispheres. The term at my university doesn't finish until mid-late June, and we only have 2 weeks over Christmas, so the only clear month would be in July before Australian universities start again. A six week programme would cause some overlap with term time which may cause issues and put students off. July is an expensive month for travel and accommodation and a lot of faculty are on research leave so getting staff to run projects for groups may be more difficult.
- Whilst I am confident that we have resource capable of supporting the operational and pastoral aspects of the initiatives proposed, I don't think at present we could commit to significant investment in additional resources or bursaries other than perhaps being able to set aside some needs based funding from WP or our travel bursary fund.

I think we are all really positive about the possibilities but securing the central support and funding for students to participate as soon as possible is key to the initiative's success.

## **12. University L**

My university would be supportive of short programs that provide different opportunities for students beyond the regular term time exchange. The proposal on research opportunities and summer school for undergraduate students would therefore be welcomed. However, I think the details needs to be considered by personnel who run such programs as they would be in a better position to identify challenges and provide solutions.

My university would not be supportive of a consortium based exchange given it already has active partnerships for student exchanges with many members of the Network. Besides, our experience in the student mobility tells us that consortium exchange are expensive and complicated to run and its success requires a much larger number of members than what WUN has.

The costing for the three proposals are extremely high when we compare it to what WUN is currently spending on the RDF. The budget asks for £140,000 – £192,000 whereas £130,000 was distributed in 2017 for the RDF.

### **13. University M**

My university would be happy to support two of the proposed initiatives, the development of grants to support UG research projects and/or a Summer School event with a research focus. We are not looking for further exchange partners, therefore cannot endorse a consortium based exchange.

If we are looking to add value to existing WUN initiatives, we would welcome a method of adding UG researchers to successful RDF/IRG projects, providing UG students with exposure to international research work and stronger engagement with local researchers. As WUN's flagship programme, we believe this would be a positive first step into engaging UG. This would be of little cost to establish and implement given the current arrangement of the secretariat.

The proposed costs in the paper seem very expensive. We would not be in a position to support an Admin/HR function to facilitate the proposed exchange programme. We have limited funds for student engagement across all three networks and would therefore look to redistribute some of this funding to support UG attendance at a WUN summer school.

### **14. University N**

While I agree with most of the ideas outlined in the report in principle, I feel that some of the proposals, such as a consortium based approach to exchange, will not work and the others would need much more in depth investigation before being considered further.

Given the very diverse institutions represented in the consortium and the very many differing views raised during the conversations of the steering group, I believe it is essential that individual institutions are given the opportunity to opt in or out as they see fit and that only participating institutions should pay towards the initiatives.

### **15. University O**

The University is not supportive of initiative 1 & 2 as the funding requirement is too high. In terms of initiative 3 we currently have sufficient exchange capacity with our existing partners, and the costs of participation are too high. As much as we would like to support this proposal we feel that the University would not benefit from the initiatives put forward.

As you are aware my university has mobility agreements with a number of WUN partner institutions and we feel we are supporting mobility across the network but it's not necessary for us to go beyond what we are currently doing.

### **16. University P**

My university's preference from the options presented in the paper is for WUN to focus on undergraduate research.

We are supportive of sending our students to WUN summer schools, and can put funds aside for this but we do not support WUN members to be asked to pay additional fees to support the initiative. Likewise, re student support for the undergraduate research.

Sorry but we do not support the consortium based exchange.

In an ideal world with unlimited funding we would support all of the excellent initiatives suggested in the paper but we, like many other WUN members, are facing declining budgets, and so we have to very carefully consider and prioritise each new proposed expenditure.

Another concern, related to above, is that WUN is in danger of spreading itself too thin with the limited funding available.

Would you support and be confident that resources would be provided by your university for the initiatives? Please state which initiative, if relevant. Please note the required resources is estimated at:

- Undergraduate research – £15K-£30K - Yes but from my own university funds, not as an additional WUN contribution
- Summer school – £15K-£25K – Yes but from my own university funds and more like \$5-10k, not as an additional WUN contribution
- Student support for both above – £35K-£52K - No
- Admin/HR support for above and consortium based exchange – £75K-£85K (please see page 8 for details). - No

2 May 2018