

CCR Debates

Exploring the Connections: The Cardiff Capital Region

one year on from Powering the Welsh Economy

18 February 2016

In February 2015, the Cardiff Capital Region Board published Powering the Welsh Economy. On the anniversary of this, Cardiff University's City Region Exchange and the Institute of Welsh Affairs jointly hosted a roundtable discussion to consider the progress made and the priorities for the immediate future. We are grateful to our invited audience of leading representatives of business, governance and academia for giving so willingly of their time and most especially to our speakers for freely sharing their ideas.

The discussion was held as a 'Chatham House' style event, where content is not attributed to individual speakers. The following note highlights some of the key points arising from the discussion.

It's now time for action

A strong message from the speakers and the audience is that we must move on from discussing what could be and actually start to deliver action on the ground, focusing on creating jobs, stimulating economic growth and building prosperity.

Governance is important

The Transition Board must work to include groups who felt marginalised under the first CCR Board and also build in effective business engagement. Whilst the Board is accountable to the Welsh Government, it also needs to operate at arm's length so that it can respond quickly to need and opportunity. There has been a real vacuum of leadership and now is the opportunity to overturn this. There is also a real need to develop more joined up approaches within the CCR, connecting the myriad different bodies with an interest in economic development, and within Welsh Government, where cross-Ministerial working is essential.

But formal governance structures are not everything

Whilst much of the debate comes back to governance structures, power and control, political agendas are not the only drivers of the city region. The city region exists already as a functioning area, and the question is therefore what can we *all* do (as businesses, universities, public authorities and others) to make it function better and to deliver jobs, growth and prosperity?

A shared vision is required

Despite the publication of Powering the Welsh Economy, there remains no shared (or collective) vision for the development of the Cardiff Capital Region. This is a real challenge going forward as it means overcoming barriers of history, geography and parochialism.

Communication has been poor

One reason for the lack of a collective vision is the poor state of communication and lack of public debate around the concept. There has been a frustrating lack of communication with communities and with many organisations and individuals who are active in the city region. There has been a sense of being unable to contribute to the development of the ideas being put forward. Good things are going on. We need to talk about them, but talk about them in a language that makes sense to the stakeholders involved.

Simplifying the message

What is the CCR's unique selling point? The answer provided was lifestyle and heritage. Wales is also the first nation to introduce well-being goals. This could be an important complement. The CCR is also about the long-term growth of the city region. The economy sees no boundaries and growth bears no relation to local authority borders.

A strategic framework is required

For the Cardiff Capital Region to operate effectively there is a need for a strategic development approach, which identifies what might happen where and is linked to the planned metro developments. This could take the form of a strategic development plan identifying sites and premises as well as strategic vision. How this connects to Local Development Plans (LDPs), and how LDPs reflect the vision for the Cardiff Capital Region are key questions.

Skills are as important as physical infrastructure

Without adequate skills, residents will not be able to access the employment opportunities being created. This will involve both FE and HE providers. It is crucial that residents can see the opportunity to build meaningful careers in the CCR and do not feel that they have to leave Wales, or are forced into marginal employment.

It's not all about Cardiff

Despite the impression given in Powering the Welsh Economy that the CCR is focused on the urban economy of Cardiff, there is a strong view that economic growth has to be encouraged across the CCR. It is a polycentric economy. This also assists in distributing economic opportunities more widely. There are pockets of value and opportunity distributed across the city region that can be accessed and supported with the right approach.

Developing clusters and value chains

There is a strong opportunity to develop clusters of activities linking universities and firms in the city region. There is already evidence of this occurring and it should be supported and strengthened. The CCR contains firms with qualities and capacities which are not always well-known, as IQE discovered when it launched an open-innovation approach to its activities.

The City Deal

The City Deal is not the same as the CCR, but it proves that joint working is possible. It also provides an important resource to the CCR (alongside Welsh Government funds, EU funding programmes and other domestic finance). Ensuring that all these activities work towards common objectives, complement (rather than duplicate) each other, and deliver real benefits to residents and businesses in the CCR is the challenge for the future.

Evidence is needed

Data and evidence is needed at the CCR scale to inform decision-making.

Collaboration is key

Good strong working relationships are more crucial than new governance arrangements. We cannot build a region if we're stumbling over each other, being more competitive than collaborative. This does not mean accepting mediocrity though. We should robustly and positively challenge each other to make improvements.

Participants

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