

Seren Network unveils 'life-changing' scholarship with Yale University, as independent report finds project is 'adding value' and 'plugging gaps'

The partnership is aiming to broaden the academic horizons of Welsh students by giving them a taste of university life in the States. The main cost of the summer school – usually \$6000 dollars – will be covered jointly by Seren and Yale.

Year 12 Seren students have until 13th Feb to apply, and will be selected via a competitive application process.

A similar collaboration between Seren and Jesus College Oxford last summer, which resulted in 73% attendees subsequently applying to Oxford, was so successful that it will now treble in size, offering around 70 pupils the chance to sample life at the prestigious institution in August.

The news comes as an independent report on the success to date of Seren, published yesterday, has found that the programme is delivering clear value for Welsh pupils and raising their aspirations.

The report found that the Seren Network is boosting Welsh pupils' confidence, and encouraging them to think more ambitiously about their university choices.

It found that Seren had been valuable in helping students make more informed choices and providing with the skills to make competitive applications.

Liam Rahman, a Yale graduate who now works as a representative for Yale in Wales, said:

"Since returning to Wales last year, it's been a real privilege to work with high potential Welsh students through the Seren Network and Yale's Alumni Schools Committee. Over the past few months, I've worked to build the relationship between Yale and The Seren Network, which has culminated in this fantastic partnership and scholarship opportunity. This scholarship will deliver life-changing opportunities to some of Wales's brightest sixth formers and gives Yale the opportunity to access some of Wales's very best talent."

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, said:

"Since launching in 2015, Seren has quickly grown to become a

recognised and valuable vehicle through which more than 2000 pupils in Wales are channelling their academic talents and ambitions.

“The report details the Network’s considerable early success, from plugging gaps in support across Wales, to forging new strategic partnerships between Wales and some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world including most recently Yale.

“Of course, there are areas for improvement which the report outlines, including a number that we’re already working to address. Nonetheless, it’s very encouraging to see a positive overview so early in the process.”

Lowri Morgan is a sixth-form student from Abercynon who has recently received an offer to study at Oxford University. She is part of the RCT/Merthyr Seren hub. She said:

“The support I received through Seren was so helpful, my degree area is Physics and Philosophy which is quite niche – but through Seren I had the opportunity to take part in several workshops with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, which taught me what to expect in the interviews.

“One of them was an exam practice workshop with Oxford and, even though the exams I ended up sitting were slightly different, the essay writing and critical thinking elements were so important. Then, ahead of the interview itself, I was taken to Howell’s School in Cardiff for a prep session, and given practice with other pupils within our subject area.

“After that I had a mock interview with Stephen Parry Jones, my Seren hub co-ordinator, which was so helpful. Without these opportunities through Seren, and the help from my head of sixth-form, I would have been completely in the dark. I wouldn’t have had the confidence that I had going into that interview, and I’m truly grateful for that.”

Dr Matthew Williams, Access and Career Development Fellow, Jesus College, Oxford, said:

“Seren is a fantastic network. It has been of enormous benefit to its participants, as well as being invaluable to academics like me who want to meet the brightest and best from across Wales.

“It is with the help of Seren that we in Oxford will be able to host our first ever all-Wales summer school in August 2017. Without the expertise and help of Seren, we would never have made as many meaningful connections with Welsh students.”

Stephen Parry Jones, RCT Seren Hub Co-ordinator and Steering Group Chair, said:

“The report is a great boost. Only three years ago, I and my fellow coordinators had blank sheets of paper, and a brief to translate Lord Murphy’s report into some sort of reality. We were initially perhaps rather daunted, but the increased confidence and ambition among Welsh students highlighted in the report are really pleasing.

“I was delighted to be at the Jesus College summer school. As coordinators, we were so impressed by the intellectual ability of students from all over Wales. The Yale offer is another exciting development. Of course, there’s still work to be done, but we’re so glad to see that Seren is already proving its worth.”

Areas for improvement outlined in the report include:

- Greater collaboration across the hubs to ensure activities benefit as many pupils as possible
- More data is needed on the overall destinations of participants, though it was recognised that this data is not yet available due to the Network’s early stages
- Though flexibility is important from hub to hub, there should be a minimum offer across hubs so participants know exactly what to expect over their 2-year programme when they join the Network
- The report notes that a Seren-style model should be extended to pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, to impact them earlier in their academic journey