

THE SEREN NETWORK

Supporting Wales' Brightest



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Parents/Guardians What you need to know

www.gov.wales/seren

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A note from the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education

Congratulations on your son/daughter's selection onto The Seren Network. They have secured a highly sought-after place on a flagship Welsh Government programme, established to ensure Wales' brightest students get the right support to make the most of their academic talents.

Seren Network pupils are selected from schools and colleges the length and breadth of Wales, and I am incredibly proud of the Network's aim to help them reach their academic potential. By getting involved with Seren, your child's horizons will be widened, their skills stretched and their thinking shaped.

However, being selected is just the first step. What pupils go on to achieve and experience is up to them and I urge you as parents/guardians to help students make the most of the opportunities that will be presented to them through Seren.

Since launching, several thousand students have already taken advantage of what the Network has



to offer, and are now studying at some of the UK's best universities, as well as further afield, including Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Princeton.

We have seen a considerable rise in the number of Welsh applicants to Oxford and Cambridge over recent years so it's clear to see that the Network is meeting its aims of raising aspirations of pupils in Wales and supporting them to achieve their full academic potential.

This year, 2018, has been a real turning point in the Network's expansion. As well as continuing to build links with universities in the UK, this year saw the launch of a new partnership between Seren and the Yale Young Global Scholars programme, through which 16 Welsh students joined more than 1,500 other students from 126 countries and 50 US states at Yale University. Our students on the Yale Young Global Scholars programme made up the biggest cohort of pupils on the programme from any country across the world – quite a feat!

Separately to this, we were delighted to see the Seren-Jesus College in Oxford University summer school treble in size this summer, after a successful first year in 2017. Through the programme, more than 70 pupils spent a week this summer sampling life at one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world.

I'm also delighted that, as of this year, the Seren programme will be expanded to earlier years, to make sure that the job of raising aspirations starts as early as possible in young people's academic journeys.

Universities in Wales play an important role in the support they give to the Network as well as on the ground through the 11 regional hubs. Your child's Seren Network hub is the means through which teachers from schools and colleges in your area are working together to create a programme of activities which will stretch and challenge pupils. Pupils will gain access to a range of activities designed to help them evidence their full potential in their applications –

from personal statement and interview support, to specific subject sessions and partnerships.

These activities are all carefully devised to challenge pupils beyond the A-level curriculum and give them a chance to enhance their subject knowledge alongside other bright students in their area.

I urge you to help your son/daughter take advantage of every opportunity this programme affords.

It is not an overstatement to say that Seren offers students a chance of a lifetime, but it will take commitment on pupils' parts to seize the opportunities presented.

Congratulations again, and I wish your son/daughter every success as a valued member of the Seren Network.

Yours sincerely,

Kirsty Williams AM

Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Education

www.gov.wales/seren

What is The Seren Network?



The vision of former Secretary of State for Wales, Paul Murphy MP – now Lord Murphy of Torfaen – the Seren Network was established to provide pupils and teachers with the support they need to ensure more students reach their academic potential and progress to the UK's top universities.

Initially comprising three regional pilot hubs, the network has expanded rapidly, with the last of the 11 hubs launched in November 2016 and the scheme now expanding widely. The network spans the length and breadth of Wales, helping around 2,000 students reach their academic potential every year.

At the beginning of each academic year, the brightest and most applied students are invited to join their region's hub, based on their outstanding GCSE results and in line with a national framework for selecting students.

The Seren Network's 11 hubs are partnerships between secondary schools and colleges, supported by local government, Welsh Government and leading universities. All Welsh state schools and colleges across Wales are represented on the programme.

Partners work together closely to develop a support programme for the brightest young minds across their region. While students are assigned to regional hubs, cross-hub collaborations also take place meaning students can also attend joint events and programmes. Hubs are led by a dedicated co-ordinator; each of whom is a highly experienced individual from a range of backgrounds.

Many Seren students have gone on to receive offers from some of the UK's best universities, as well as further afield in the US at Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Princeton.

The Seren Network hubs

- 1 Flintshire & Wrexham
Graham Kelly, graham.kelly@hecsl.co.uk
- 2 Swansea
Felicity Padley,
felicity.padley@gowercollegeswansea.ac.uk
- 3 Rhondda Cynon Taff & Merthyr Tydfil
Stephen Parry-Jones,
stephen.parry-jones@rctcbc.gov.uk
- 4 Pembrokeshire & Carmarthenshire
Julian Dessent,
Dessentj@hwbmail.net
- 5 EAS Consortia (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen & Monmouthshire)
Siân Farquharson,
sian.farquharson@sewaleseas.org.uk
- 6 Cardiff
Julie Elliott, julie.elliott@cardiff.gov.uk
- 7 Neath Port Talbot, Powys & Bridgend
Jayne Bevan, (Powys contact)
jayne.bevan@powys.gov.uk
Karen Thomas (Neath Port Talbot contact)
k.thomas5@npt.gov.uk
John Fabes (Bridgend contact)
john.fabes@bridgend.gov.uk
- 8 Conwy & Denbighshire
Christine Wynne, c.wynne@gllm.ac.uk
- 9 Anglesey & Gwynedd
Elfed Thomas Morris,
elfedmorris@gwynedd.gov.uk
- 10 Ceredigion
Sian Bowen
c/o.mary.davies@ceredigion.gov.uk
- 11 Vale of Glamorgan
Nisha Shukla,
nshukla@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk



What your child can expect to attend as part of the Network

There are many ways your son/daughter will benefit from being a member of the Network. Your hub co-ordinator will devise a dedicated schedule of support, which will include the following:

Information, advice and guidance sessions, including:

- Preparatory sessions in areas like writing a personal statement, an application, or preparing for an interview or admissions test.
- Expert advice and support sessions in areas like student finance and scholarships.
- Outreach visits to leading university campuses.

Academic sessions, including:

- Subject-specific academic 'stretch and challenge' workshops that take you beyond the A-level curriculum, in areas ranging from arts and humanities to STEM.
- Face-to-face advice and tutorials delivered by leading academic lights from top UK universities.

- Advice on specific areas of study or subject matters, such as applying for medicine or applying to a US university.

Unique opportunities, including:

- The chance to apply for life-changing enrichment activities, such as the Seren-Jesus College summer school at Oxford University, and Yale Young Global Scholars Programme at Yale University.
- An annual Seren national conference, which brings together Seren students with leading academics for a packed programme taking students beyond the curriculum.
- The opportunity to build new links and friendships with other bright sparks looking to reach their academic potential at the world's leading universities.

Along with these opportunities which are open to Seren students across Wales, at a regional level, each hub has its own schedule of events for students. Please contact your hub co-ordinator for more information - contact details can be found at gov.wales/seren or in the following pages.

FAQs for parents

Do I have to pay for my child to be part of the Seren Network?

Your child has been selected based on merit and their academic achievements. There is no cost to being part of the network and we want to ensure that no student is unable to participate due to financial circumstances. Please talk to your school/college for further information.

What will my child get from being part of the Seren Network?

Your child will have access to a range of activities and opportunities, delivered by some of the top universities, who'll offer expert advice and guidance on how to best prepare for applications in the UK and abroad. The Network brings together young, like-minded people to share ambitions and aspirations.

Activities vary from hub to hub, but include:

- Personal statement writing, including how to choose a degree and university.
- Extended reading and research.
- Interview practice and techniques.
- Visits to top universities.
- Subject-specific workshops.

There will also be opportunities to apply for summer schools between Year 12 and 13 to experience life at university.

The Seren Network has established partnerships with many leading institutions including:

- University of Oxford, Jesus College
- University of Cambridge, Churchill College
- USA summer school, through the Yale Young Global Scholars Programme

While we have direct links with these programmes and universities, we recommend researching any other Summer Schools you may be interested in. Each Seren hub across Wales will provide a menu of activity at the start of the year, from which pupils will choose a range of trips and events alongside full-day events locally and nationally.

My child doesn't want to apply to Oxford or Cambridge. Is the Seren Network relevant to them?

Absolutely. While Seren has strong links with Oxford and Cambridge, it has also built partnerships and programmes with many other Sutton Trust Universities. More than 30 academic institutions attended its recent annual conference, and new relationships are being forged all the time. Many of the opportunities and sessions offered to your child are not specific to any academic institution – for example personal statement writing or choosing a subject – so it is designed to benefit all pupils, regardless of their choice of university. The Seren Network provides the basis for each of our students to make the most appropriate choice.

Is university the right route for all bright students?

The Seren Network was established in response to declining numbers of pupils applying to the top universities and is designed to support bright Welsh students to make competitive applications. With this in mind, the Network's activities and content are designed to cater for those who are considering higher education. Pupils who are unsure of their future are advised to keep an open mind and make the most of the activities on offer, but if they decide that university is not the right route for them, there is no obligation to attend the activities on offer. Similarly, pupils do not have to take up the offer of a place on the Seren Network.

How do I find out what events are available through my hub across the academic year?

Each hub designs its own annual calendar of activities. To find out information on your hub's activities, please contact your local hub co-ordinator.

What if none of the events happening in my child's hub seem relevant to my child's areas of study/interest?

Hubs are working collaboratively to offer cross-region activities, so there may be an opportunity to take part in workshops that are being offered elsewhere. The first port of call should always be your local hub co-ordinator who may be able to suggest other activities in different hubs that you may be able to attend.

Will being part of the Seren Network put my child under additional pressure throughout sixth-form?

The Seren Network is there to provide information, advice and guidance to students at an important time when they have big decisions to make about their future. The Network is there to reduce anxiety about the university application process, and ensure Wales' brightest students are being given the support needed to achieve their full potential.

How will my child get to hub events?

Arrangements for each hub will differ, according to the size and geography of the hub. Each hub is likely to have a number of students travelling to events from the same school or college so there may be lift-sharing opportunities available. Transport to activities may be provided, particularly in rural areas. For hub-specific information, contact your hub co-ordinator.

How much time will my child be expected to commit to Seren?

Each hub will have a different schedule of activities so the time commitment will vary between hubs. Workshops and activities will take a few hours a month, but you'll also have access to reading lists and follow up activities to do in your own time if you wish. In addition, pupils will have access to unique opportunities such as the Jesus College Summer School at Oxford University, and the Yale Young Global Scholars Programme – both of which take place in the summer holidays between Years 12 and 13.

Does being a member of Seren guarantee my son/daughter a place at a Russell Group or Sutton Trust University?

No. Being a member of the Seren Network does not guarantee any pupil a place at any university. Members will still need to apply through the normal routes. What the Network can help with, however, is helping shape students' thought processes and skill-level in areas including subject choice, applications and admissions advice. The Network's aim is to raise Welsh pupils' aspirations and knowledge of university, in order to make as competitive an application as possible.

What advice & support can I give my child during their time with Seren?

- Seize every opportunity offered – this will help your child make an informed choice on their route after school
- Follow the Seren social media channels which will provide the most up-to-date news and opportunities
- Work hard!

Useful sources of support to help your child make a decision on university

UCAS.com

Visit UCAS.com for a range of information, including parent information tools, terms explained, money advice

The Which? Parents guide to university

Download a free guide containing everything you - as a mum, dad, carer or family member - need to help them make the best choices www.university.which.co.uk/

The Complete University Guide

Helping students around the world research degree courses and universities. Independent UK university league tables and rankings, overall and by subject. www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/

Studential

Find out more about applying to university through UCAS, surviving Freshers' Week, tips on student cooking and advice on a host of other university issues. www.studential.com/

Times Higher Education:

Provides global higher education coverage. Find world university rankings, news, opinions, features and book reviews. www.timeshighereducation.com/student

The Guardian University Guide

Latest University guide news, comment and analysis from the Guardian, the world's leading liberal voice. www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide

The Student Room

The UK's biggest student community. Boost your grades, learn with free study tools, find your perfect uni place & get answers to any question on the forums. www.thestudentroom.co.uk/

Other key information

The annual Seren Conference 2018

The annual Seren Conference in December will be the biggest yet and aims to bring together pupils from the Network with leading academics for a packed programme that goes beyond the curriculum. The three-day conference is a great opportunity for your son or daughter to meet other students across the Network and take part in exciting workshops and masterclasses led by experts from universities including Oxford, Cambridge, Kings College London, Imperial College London and Bath. This year we are very pleased to welcome guest speakers from the US to provide valuable insights into studying at top US universities and the application process.

DON'T LET MONEY GET IN THE WAY OF UNIVERSITY



All eligible first time Welsh students starting a university course will receive support for living costs, made up of a mixture of grants and loans. Most will receive support equivalent to the National Living Wage. This will mean you can focus on your studies and spend less time worrying about making ends meet.

The minimum grant you could get is £1,000, which you do not have to pay back. If you're studying full-time as an undergraduate, through a mixture of grants and loans, you could be eligible for up to £11,250 a year towards your living costs if you live away from home and study in London, and £9,000 per year in the rest of the UK. Part-time undergraduates will receive similar support, on a pro-rata basis based on the course's intensity.

In addition, most students will have no upfront costs to pay as a tuition fee loan can be taken out to cover their course.

To find out more about your options, visit www.studentfinancewales.co.uk



