

Note of the meeting of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee held on 20 October 2009 at Linden Court, Ilex Close, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5DZ

Present:

Members:

Professor Sir Brian Smith (Acting Chair)
Professor Peter Blood - Cardiff University
Simon Bradley, Business Representative
Ruth Brooks - representing Welsh Heads of Careers Services (WHECS)
Dr Alastair Davies – representing Welsh Assembly Government (DE&T)
Professor Richard Davies – representing Heads of Higher Education Wales (HEW)
Professor Dylan Jones-Evans – University of Wales
Dr Steven Hill – Research Councils UK
Professor Brian Hobbs – University of Glamorgan
Geraint Jones – representing Network of Welsh Industrial Liaison Officers (WILOs)
Sue Morgan - representing Welsh Assembly Government (DE&T)
Professor Duncan Tanner – Bangor University
Dr David Walker, Business representative
Professor Robin Williams, Council member

Attendees:

Dr Louise Bright, WAG secondee

Observers:

Karen Latham - Welsh Assembly Government (DCELLS)
Greg Walker (HEW)

Officers:

Roger Carter - Head of Research Business & Communities
Linda Tiller – Senior Research Manager (Joint Secretary)
Jackie Cresswell-Griffith (GO Wales Programme Manager)
Dr Alyson Thomas - Senior Economic Development Manager

Apologies

Teresa Cooper – Senior Economic Development Manager (Joint Secretary)
Gwennan Jones - representing Network of Welsh European Liaison Officers (WELOs)
Professor Garel Rees, HEFCW member (Chair)
Ken Richards – HEFCW Member

1 Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 Professor Garel Rees had sent apologies because of ill health and had nominated Professor Sir Brian Smith to chair the committee in his absence. Apologies were also received from Teresa Cooper, Gwennan Jones and Ken Richards.
- 1.2 Brian Smith welcomed:
- Professor Robin Williams, who had been appointed to the Committee as an additional HEFCW Council representative
 - Dr Louise Bright, on secondment to WAG from the University of Glamorgan, who had been invited to present a report on Research Council income (Agendum 2).

2 Notes of the Meeting held on 21 April 2009

- 2.1 The Notes of the meeting held on 21 April 2009 were approved, subject to the following amendments:
- a) *Note 4.4: Presentation on HEIs and Community Engagement*
Amend fourth bullet point to delete “*whilst many institutions*” and replace with “*whilst some institutions.*”
- b) *Note 5.3: Consultation on Third Mission Funding Arrangements*
Amend to read: “*Given also that VCs regularly argued that 3M/Engagement activity is now substantially embedded into their organisational bloodstream, the forthcoming consultation exercise should invite consideration of whether or not HEFCW should continue to provide a dedicated stream of 3M funding at all.*”

3 Matters Arising

- a) *Note 5: Preparations for Consultation on HEFCW’s Third Mission Funding Arrangements*
It was reported that a consultation paper on future 3M funding arrangements would be published within the next few days, with responses due in early January. A consultation workshop would be held in December (provisional date 4 December), and all members of the Committee would be invited to attend. The outcomes of the consultation would be discussed at the January meeting of the Committee.
- b) *Note 6: Consultation on Proposed Research Excellence Framework*
The Committee’s comments had been relayed to the UK-wide REF Steering Group. A consultation paper had been published in September (W09/30HE), with responses requested by 16 December. A consultation

event would be held in Cardiff on 11 November, and all members of the RIE Committee had been invited to attend.

4 Improving Wales' Share of Research Council Income and Enhancing Research Collaboration

- 4.1 Dr Louise Bright presented a report on a project undertaken by DCELLS to investigate ways in which Wales' performance in attracting Research Council grants could be improved, including through enhanced collaboration.
- 4.2 The volume of Research Council grant applications submitted by Welsh HEIs had increased in recent years, but this had not translated into improved success rates. Potential solutions identified by the project included a need for larger-scale, collaborative bids; an increased focus on areas in which Wales has distinctive strengths; and internal institutional peer review of bids.
- 4.3 Other outcomes of the project included:
 - a) Two events for researchers, held jointly with the Research Councils, to promote new collaborative partnerships in Research Council priority areas (Ageing and Digital Economy)
 - b) The establishment of the Wales Research Office Liaison Officers Network - WROLOs
 - c) A forthcoming event involving staff who serve on Research Council panels and bodies

Additionally, events were planned for December and January to showcase the four WAG priority areas for research to the Research Councils and to industry.

4.4 Points made in discussion included the following:

- In addition to the issues identified in the report, further factors considered to underlie Wales' underperformance were:
 - A proportionately lower number of STEM researchers.
 - A need for more researchers of the very highest quality. It was suggested that one of the most effective ways of boosting Research Council income would be through a recruitment drive to attract additional top-quality senior researchers.
 - Some major research initiatives are politically driven from Whitehall, which was perceived to give English HEIs an advantage. It was suggested that WAG should make greater efforts to influence the UK research policy agenda, and should also seek to influence the European agenda, as Ireland had done successfully in the case of the Framework programme.
- There are areas in which collaboration can usefully build critical mass, but this is not universally the case and collaboration should not be seen as an end in itself. There were also concerns that there is sometimes too much

emphasis on promoting collaboration **within** Wales, whereas there is also a need for Welsh HEIs to collaborate more with strong research partners from **outside** Wales.

- Although the report recommended focusing on large-scale grants, success rates for these schemes can be lower. There is a need for researchers to first build a track record with successful smaller applications.
- Whilst success rates for Research Council funding in Wales have decreased as the process has become generally more competitive, there has been an encouraging increase in research income from industry.
- It was indicated in discussion that 97% of R&D is undertaken by large companies, and that the potential of increasing industrial research income through collaboration with SMEs should therefore not be over-estimated. Some clarification of the derivation of the figure of 97% was requested. *[This information was subsequently circulated to the Committee.]*
- It was pointed out that, whilst competitive levels of QR funding are important, adequate levels of teaching funding are also important in order to ensure that staff time for research is not squeezed out by high teaching loads.
- It was noted that the data in the DCELLS' report should be expanded to include the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, which had an excellent track record with AHRC funding.

4.5 The Committee thanked Louise Bright for her presentation.

5 The Welsh Research Base following the 2008 RAE

5.1 Roger Carter presented a paper which analysed the current position of the HE research base in Wales following the 2008 RAE and initiated consideration of possible options for the future. The evidence suggested that the research base in Wales is facing significant challenges, particularly in relation to scale of activity, and is lagging behind other parts of the UK. The paper proposed that, to address these issues, HEFCW should adopt a more strategic approach to research funding which would focus the available resources on areas where there is substantial research excellence and real critical mass. It was understood that there were likely to be significant changes to research funding arrangements in other parts of the UK.

5.2 It was intended that the Committee should have an initial discussion at the present meeting, and that it would return to the issue at a future meeting, in the context of the forthcoming Manifesto for Change and associated action plan.

5.3 Points made in discussion included the following:

- There were concerns about the timing of any changes to QR funding arrangements. Institutions had already been alerted by HEFCW to the need

to plan for possible reductions to the level of recurrent grant generally. If there were to be any changes to QR, institutions would wish to be able to take these into account in the same round of contingency planning.

- It was noted that, in the UK as a whole, some quite small institutions were strong research players. It was pointed out, however, that the crucial factor is the size of research teams, rather than overall institutional scale.
- There were concerns that the research base should not become overly-focused on priority areas relevant to current problems, as this could limit its ability to respond to emerging future challenges. It was also considered important that any additional investment in STEM should not undermine existing strengths in humanities and social sciences.
- The following points were made in relation to the proposition that additional support for PGR should be a priority area for investment:
 - HEIs are already providing additional studentships for PGR, and any additional HEFCW funding would need to add value rather than duplicate provision.
 - Quality of supervision is crucial, and there therefore needs to be a careful balance between numbers of staff at senior level and PGR numbers.
- Institutions could do more to secure a supply of researchers for themselves by being proactive in encouraging final year undergraduate students to consider taking research degrees.
- It was suggested that, in a devolved context, there could be a case for ring-fencing Wales' share of Research Council income. Against this, however, it was argued that it is essential that research in Wales is demonstrably of equal quality and competitive with the rest of the UK.
- The following comments were made in relation to the data contained in the paper:
 - Part of the reason that Wales' performance in the 2008 RAE looked weaker than other parts of the UK was the inclusion of a long tail of 1* research.
 - There was no information about the proportions of total research active staff submitted for assessment. *[Note: It had not proved possible for HESA to collect the data which would have been required in order to provide this measure.]*
 - The value of aggregated RAE data was limited and that more detailed breakdowns at institutional and subject level were required.

5.4 Members were encouraged to submit any further comments to the secretariat by email.

6 UK Research Concordat

- 6.1 Alyson Thomas presented a paper on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The paper set out the principles of the Concordat and described activities currently being undertaken for its implementation, which were being overseen by a UK-wide by a Strategy Group, chaired by Sir Ivor Crewe. A budget had been provided to support implementation and this had, among other things enabled the employment of a Co-ordinator. Vitae was also playing a key role in implementation arrangements and, in Wales, HEFCW and Vitae had held a joint launch event for the Concordat in January.
- 6.2 The Research Concordat Strategy Group would be inviting all UK institutions to complete a questionnaire during Autumn 2009 to indicate their engagement with the Concordat agenda. Satisfactory responses would demonstrate the UK's alignment with the requirements of the European Commission's Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers, thereby obviating the need for all institutions to demonstrate their compliance individually.
- 6.3 The following points were made in discussion:
- Responsibility for implementing the Concordat rested with individual institutions. However, there could be scope for some collaborative activity, particularly in relation to staff development events and networking.
 - The Committee welcomed the opportunity for the UK HE sector to demonstrate collective compliance with European Commission requirements through completion of the Concordat questionnaire.

7 Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW Programmes

- 7.1 The Committee received presentations from Karen Latham (DCELLS), Alastair Davies (DE&T), Sue Morgan (DE&T) and Jackie Creswell-Griffith (GO Wales Manager) on funding programmes which support higher education-business interactions, including the skills agenda. This item had been included in response to a suggestion from Professor Dylan Jones-Evans at the previous meeting that the Committee should be briefed on the full range of schemes operating in this area (Note 10.1 refers.)
- 7.2 It was agreed that the copies of the presentations would be emailed to members of the Committee following the meeting.

Information Papers

8 NAW Learning and Enterprise Committee Report: *The Economic Contribution of HE in Wales*

- 8.1 The Committee received the NAW Learning and Enterprise Committee's recently-published report on *The Economic Contribution of HE in Wales* (copies tabled at the meeting).
- 8.2 Roger Carter outlined some of the key recommendations in the report. It was agreed that the report would be considered more fully at the January meeting of the Committee in the context of WAG's response to the report and the Manifesto for Change and action plan.

9 Impact of HE on Regional Economies

- 9.1 Roger Carter reported that a stakeholders' event on the ESRC/Funding Bodies' programme on the *Impact of HEIs on Regional Economies* would be held in Cardiff on 30 November. All members of the RIE Committee will be invited to attend. The two research projects to be featured in the event were both using Wales as a key comparator region.

10 SETQW Paper on Skills and Employability

- 10.1 The Committee received, for information, a paper on skills and employability. This had been prepared for the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee, which was focusing on that issue at its meeting on 21 October. It was noted that the RIE Committee would also discuss this issue at a future meeting.

11 Evaluation of HEFCW's 3M Fund 2004-05 to 2006-07

- 11.1 The Committee received, for information, the Executive Summary of the evaluation of the 3M Fund which had been commissioned from Innovas.
- 11.2 The findings and recommendations from the report had been incorporated into the paper on *Preparations for Consultation on HEFCW's 3M Funding Arrangements for 2010/11 to 2012/13*, which had been discussed at the July meeting of the Committee. The report had also been used to inform the Consultation paper, which would be published shortly. The report itself would be published in full on the HEFCW website.

12 Subjects of Broader Importance to Wales: Developments in Modern Foreign Languages

12.1 The Committee received, for information, a paper on Developments in Modern Foreign Languages in the context of Subjects of Broader Importance to Wales which had been prepared for the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee.

13 Minutes of the Meeting of the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee held on 26 June 2009

13.1 The Committee received, for information, the Minutes of the meeting of the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality held on 26 June 2009.

14 Dates of Future Meetings

14.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 26 January 2009.

14.2 It was agreed that a further three meetings should be scheduled for 2010, to be held in April, July and October. Dates would be advised by email.

15 Any Other Business

- a) Members requested that a message should be sent to Garel Rees on behalf of the Committee to wish him a speedy recovery.
- b) Geraint Jones requested that an item on the Charities Act and its potential impact on universities' non-public benefit activities should be included on the agenda for a future meeting.
- c) It was agreed that the meeting had attempted to cover too much business, and that future agendas should be more focussed.