

**Draft Notes of RIE Committee Meeting
29 June 2010**

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg Uwch Cymru Higher Education Funding Council for Wales		Disclosable
		Reference RIEC/10/29

Unconfirmed notes of the meeting of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee held on 29 June 2010 at Linden Court, Ilex Close, Llanishen, Cardiff, CF14 5DZ

Present:

Members:

Professor Robin Williams (Chair)
Professor Peter Blood - Cardiff University
Nick Bodycombe - representing Network of Welsh European Liaison Officers (WELOs)
Professor Richard Davies - representing Heads of Higher Education Wales (HEW)
Professor Brian Hobbs - University of Glamorgan
Professor Dylan Jones-Evans – University of Wales
Geraint Jones - representing Network of Welsh Industrial Liaison Officers (WILOs)
Sue Morgan - Welsh Assembly Government (DE&T)
Nina Parks - HEFCW Council Member
Professor Michael Woods - University of Aberystwyth

Attendees:

Adrian Day – HEFCE for items 1 to 3

Observers:

Elizabeth Clarke - Higher Education Wales
Dr Rachel Garside-Jones - Welsh Assembly Government (DCELLS)
Karen Latham - Welsh Assembly Government (DCELLS)
Roger Thomas - Chair of HEFCW

Officers:

David Blaney - Director of Strategic Development for items 1 to 3
Roger Carter - Head of Research Business & Communities
Teresa Cooper - Senior Economic Development Manager (Joint Secretary)
Jackie Cresswell-Griffith – GO Wales Programme Manager
Dr Tove Oliver - Europe and International Manager
Linda Tiller - Senior Research Manager (Joint Secretary)
Dr Alyson Thomas - Senior Economic Development Manager

Apologies

Simon Bradley – Business representative
Ruth Brooks - representing Welsh Heads of Careers Services (WHECS)
Dr Alastair Davies – representing Welsh Assembly Government (DE&T)

Dr Steven Hill – Research Councils UK
Professor Sir Brian Smith – HEFCW Council Member
Dr David Walker – Business representative

1 Welcomes

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed two new Members to their first meeting, Nina Parks and Michael Woods, and invited them to say a few words about their particular areas of interest. The Chair also welcomed Elizabeth Clarke as the new HEW officer observer in place of Greg Walker.

2 Notes of the Meeting held on 19 April 2010

- 2.1 The notes of the meeting held on 19 April 2010 were accepted as a true record with the proviso that Professor Dylan Jones-Evans be added to the list of attendees.
- 2.2 The following matters arising from the last meeting were noted:

a) *Note 2.2 - Criteria for Designation as a National Research Centre*

Roger Carter noted that HEFCW had received no formal response to the letter submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government on 30 January 2010. However, Rachel Garside-Jones was able to inform the Committee that the proposed criteria had been accepted.

b) *Note 4 - European and International Opportunities and Challenges for Welsh HE*

Arising from the discussions under this heading at the last meeting, the following points were raised:

- HEW had now appointed a consultant to help develop an International Strategy approach and a useful seminar had taken place on 23 June 2010 with representatives from both WAG and the sector. The Committee endorsed a suggestion that the outcomes of this seminar should be reported to the next meeting of the WAG's External and European affairs Committee.
- Members again expressed concern that *For our Future* contained so few direct references to HE activities on the European (particularly in relation to the Bologna Process) and wider international fronts, which made the development of a comprehensive International strategy all the more important.
- It was also not yet clear how far HE's international agenda would be reflected in the Assembly Government's soon to be published Economic Recovery Programme (expected on 6 July 2010) and in the context of economic impact, it was suggested that the International Strategy might

give consideration to the economic contribution from the number of new business start-ups generated by international students and graduates

c) *Note – Establishment of Research Sub-Group*

The Chair announced that the core membership of the Research Sub-Group would be: Robin Williams (Chair); Professor Richard Davies (RIEC member); Professor Teresa Rees (PVC Research, Cardiff University); Dr Graeme Reid (Deputy Director of Economic Impact at DBIS). The core membership would be augmented as and when appropriate by additional representation from business and the wider HE sector. The Sub-Group would meet for the first time on the afternoon of 29 June, for initial scoping discussions.

d) *Note – Report of the UK Research Integrity Futures Working Group*

Linda Tiller reported that the Committee's recommendation that HEFCW should support and contribute funding to the proposed new *Integrity Service* had not yet been passed to Council. This was because a number of operational issues relating to the proposed development had yet to be resolved, making a recommendation to Council at this stage premature.

3 Higher Education-Business & Community Interaction Survey (HEBCIS)

3.1 The Chair welcomed Adrian Day, Senior Policy Advisor at the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and invited him to present the outcomes of the latest HEBCIS to the Committee.

3.2 Adrian Day began his presentation by looking at the history and overall aims of the HEBCIS and the extent to which it is used by HE funders and Government stakeholders across the UK. He explained that whilst the current survey provided quantitative performance data for the academic year 2008/09, the more qualitative data provided in Annex A provided a current snap-shot of infrastructures and resources already in place for 2009/10. The presentation also looked at some long term survey trends across the UK and concluded that in spite of the unfavourable economic conditions, which had prevailed over the last two survey years, HEIs across the UK were still making a positive impact on economic and social well-being through their business and community interactions. Overall, HEIs were reporting problems in achieving planned growth, rather than any significant reductions in either levels of knowledge exchange activity or income.

3.3 Adrian Day responded to questions from members ranging from issues of process, particularly around data validation and data quality, to issues of policy and context (including the difficulties posed when making international performance comparisons in this area).

3.4 Following on from Adrian Day's presentation on the UK complexion of HEBCIS, Teresa Cooper presented a paper that focused in on the performance of Welsh HEIs in the latest and previous HE-BCI surveys. There then followed a general

discussion about the extent to which HEBCIS outcomes should be used to demonstrate the sector's contribution to the *For our Future* policy imperatives of delivering social justice and a buoyant economy and its usefulness in evaluating the contribution of individual HEIs. The following key points were raised:

- HEIs in Wales perform well in key areas of knowledge exchange activity reported in HEBCIS and achieve beyond their nominal 5% UK weighting in several ;
- The profile of HEBCIS in Wales should be raised higher both within HEIs and with key stakeholders;
- Within HEIs - issues of data capture and the completeness of survey returns should be addressed more proactively and one way of doing this would be to raise the profile of HEBCIS returns in the agenda for Council's institutional visits;
- For external stakeholders – whilst HEBCIS provides a useful indicator of Welsh HE performance, more work should be done to develop complimentary metrics that derive more specifically from Wales' own policy context. (However, this would need to be achieved without adding significantly to institutions' existing data collection burden).
- Whilst Welsh HEIs perform well in delivering services to SMEs, they perform significantly less well than other areas of the UK in delivering services to large businesses – even though interactions with large business do generate more income than the reported higher numbers of interactions with SMEs. Members agreed that more should be done to evaluate the impact of rather than just count the numbers of interactions.
- In the light of the outcomes of the above evaluation, consideration should be given to the extent to which knowledge exchange funding in Wales (from both HEFCW and WAG) incentivises *correct* behaviour on the part of HEIs.
- In the context of forthcoming cuts in public expenditure, the reliance of HEIs in Wales on contracts/income with public sector organisations is likely to prove problematical.
- Given Wales' continuing poor performance in HEBCIS in relation to the generation of income from the commercialisation of intellectual property, further work should be done to evaluate the ways in which the commercialisation agenda is being delivered by HEIs and the extent to which current funding schemes to stimulate the exploitation of intellectual property (particularly via A4B) are likely to impact on HEBCIS returns and when.
- Consideration should be given to using HEBCIS to capture 'costs' associated with HEI participation in European-funded programmes as reported in Annex B of the survey.

- 3.5 The Chair thanked Adrian Day for an informative presentation and his contribution to the ensuing debate.

4 *For our Future*

- 4.1 Roger Carter updated the committee on progress to date with the action plan for the implementation of *For our Future* and the way that it was being embedded in HEFCW's new corporate strategy for 2009-10 to 2011-12, which was currently awaiting approval from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

5 Foundation Degree (FD) Policy

- 5.1 Roger Carter introduced this item. He explained that the development of a WAG FD policy had been a commitment within *Skills that Work for Wales* in 2008, which was reiterated within *For our Future* and that HEFCW had recently been invited by WAG to prepare a HEFCW policy on FDs and to take it forward as part of our regional agenda for higher education. This, therefore, was the first opportunity to take the draft policy through HEFCW's processes. The dates, however, were difficult: any steers offered by RIEC would be fed through to the Council meeting on 2 July, when approval of the draft policy would be sought. The policy would then be finalised, taking on board additional input from SETQ on 8 July. The policy would be published by the end of July. Also to note was the fact that the Minister would be making an oral statement on *For our Future* on 29 June (today) and issuing a written statement on FDs on 6 July, which would announce the HEFCW policy.

- 5.2 In a wide ranging discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members expressed caution over the credibility of this qualification and the extent to which it would enhance employment opportunities for students.
- Some members were not convinced that employers in Wales had grasped the FD concept, as opposed to the generally well-understood HND qualification. It was noted, however, that that employers tend now to be much more open to qualifications that build in progression routes.
- The Committee recognised that managing (and stimulating) demand would be a challenge. This had been an issue for the HEW ESF Foundation Degree Programme in its operation so far.
- There was also a particular problem with the concept of employer engagement in the delivery (as opposed to the development) of FD provision. The experience of HEIs currently running FDs proved that it took time and effort to build a joint approach, and that the running of such courses had not been cost-effective.

- The Committee was not yet convinced that sector skills councils (SSCs), in general, were in a position to contribute in terms of employer engagement.
 - The Committee expressed concern that, especially in the context of FEIs acquiring FDaPs, FDs would not be delivered within a higher education environment. It was noted, however, that the HEFCW policy clearly emphasised the partnership nature of this provision.
 - The Committee recognised the potential role for FDs in sectors where they might represent new opportunities for CPD for the existing workforce (eg health and social care, careers). However, in sectors such as engineering it could be argued that there was already established provision.
 - There was concern that FDs are not recognised in Europe (they fall outside the Bologna process). Although the Committee noted that FDs in many respects were intended to be a response to the needs and circumstances of local employers and individuals, there was nevertheless a weakness in terms of their limitations as international portable qualifications. It was also clear that they would be of no use in attracting international students and generally did not fit well with the course portfolio HEIs offered to attract international students to their institutions.
 - There was concern over what would happen to this provision at the end of the funding period (this was also the case with the ESF-funded provision). HEIs would need to consider the extent to which FDs were embedded in their portfolio in the light of proven employer demand.
- 5.3 In conclusion, it was agreed that there would need to be some hard work on the part of partners (HEIs, FEIs, SSCs as well as HEFCW) to make this policy work and deliver. The Committee noted from the draft policy that a proportion of the available funding would be dedicated to employer engagement, demand side development and the development of FD provision in direct response to employer need and endorsed the inclusion of a development phase. In the context of testing demand and employer engagement, it was suggested that it might be helpful to focus on the key priority sectors identified by the Welsh Assembly Government's Ministerial Advisory Group. The requirements of WAG's forthcoming Economic Renewal Programme would also need to be taken into account.

6 Evaluation of the effectiveness of links between HEIs and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in Wales

- 6.1 Alyson Thomas introduced this paper, which presented the above independent evaluation by consultancy company, Old Bell 3.
- 6.2 The Committee received the report and welcomed the conclusions drawn by Old Bell 3, and several members confirmed that the following observation chimed with their own experiences of SSCs:

“...while there are some robust relationships which are bringing real benefit, these are the exceptions. Overall, we found relatively few substantial relationships.....”

- 6.3 The Committee, however, acknowledged the prominence given to SSCs in *For our Future* and other Welsh Assembly Government policy documents and suggested that HEFCW would need to work closely with Assembly officers to ensure that policy aspirations in respect of SSCs should be realistically managed, with HE efforts focused on relationships with those SSCs with clearly defined and articulated high level skills needs.
- 6.4 Members attention was also drawn to the comment in the Old Bell 3 report that whilst within HEIs “systems are generally well attuned to help potential students reach the right person....., the same is not true for businesses and other stakeholders”. This reflected earlier discussions in the HEBCIS debate reported at note 4 above, where although the survey recorded that all HEIs had dedicated enquiry points for business, members noted that institutions continued to face regular criticism for being *business unfriendly*. The Committee agreed that this was an issue that also needed addressing.

7 For Information Papers

- 7.1 The Committee received for information papers on the three following topics:
- The third annual report from the Co-ordinators of the *Impact of HEIs on Regional Economies*; a research venture being co-funded by HEFCW;
 - A summary of recently published reports relevant to the sector’s research, innovation and engagement activities; and
 - The minutes of the meeting of HEFCW’s Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee held on 24 March 2010.

8 GO Wales research initiative

- 8.1 Jackie Cresswell-Griffith reported that officers were currently considering potential research topics relevant to the GO Wales agenda and invited members to email her with any topics that they would like to see considered for further exploration.

9 Next meeting

- 9.1 The Chair confirmed that at the invitation of Professor David Walker, the next meeting would be held in North Wales on 12 October 2010 at the Optic Technium in St. Asaph. Professor John Harries, the newly appointed Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales, will be attending this meeting, which will commence at 11 am.