


**Draft Notes of RIE Committee Meeting
12 October 2010**

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg Uwch Cymru Higher Education Funding Council for Wales		Disclosable
		Reference RIEC/11/01

Unconfirmed notes of the meeting of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee held on 12 October 2010 at the OpTIC Technium, St Asaph

Present:

Members:

Professor Robin Williams (Chair)
Nick Bodycombe - representing Network of Welsh European Liaison Officers (WELOs)
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 Brian Hobbs - University of Glamorgan
Geraint Jones - representing Network of Welsh Industrial Liaison Officers (WILOs)
Nina Park - HEFCW Council Member
Dr David Walker – Business representative
Professor Michael Woods - University of Aberystwyth

Attendees:

Professor Phil Gummatt - Chief Executive, HEFCW
Professor John Harries - Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales
Roger Thomas – Chair, HEFCW Council

Officers:

Roger Carter - Head of Research Business & Communities
Teresa Cooper - Senior Economic Development Manager (Joint Secretary)
Linda Tiller - Senior Research Manager (Joint Secretary)
Dr Alyson Thomas - Senior Economic Development Manager

Apologies

Professor Peter Blood - Cardiff University
Simon Bradley – Business representative
Elizabeth Clarke - Higher Education Wales
Professor Dylan Jones-Evans – University of Wales
Dr Rachel Garside-Jones - DCELLS
Dr Steven Hill – Research Councils UK
Sue Morgan - Welsh Assembly Government (DE&T)
Professor Sir Brian Smith – HEFCW Council Member

1 Welcomes

- 1.1 The Chair thanked David Walker and his colleagues for their hospitality in hosting the Committee's meeting at the OpTIC Technium, and for the opportunity for members to tour the Technium.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Professor John Harries, Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales, who had been invited to address the Committee (Agendum 3).
- 1.3 The Chair reported that Karen Latham (Welsh Assembly Government observer) had stepped down from the Committee following her retirement from WAG. It was noted that this did not create a vacancy as she had shared the observer role with Rachel Garside-Jones. It was agreed that the Chair would write to Karen to thank her for her contributions to the Committee.

2 Notes of the Meeting held on 29 June 2010

- 2.1 The notes of the meeting held on 29 June 2010 were accepted as a true record.
- 2.2 The following matters arising from the last meeting were noted:

a) Note 5 – Foundation Degree Policy

It was reported that the Council had approved the Foundation Degree Policy at its July meeting, taking account of the RIEC's comments. The policy had been published in July as Circular 10/29 HE, which had also announced the allocation of funding for the development, promotion and delivery of new part-time foundation degree provision, with proposals invited by January 2011.

b) 2.2(b) – European and International Opportunities and Challenges for Welsh HE

The consultant appointed by HEW to help develop the International Strategy was expected to report in November. It was noted that the External and European Affairs Committee mentioned in the note was a Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, rather than a WAG Committee.

c) 7.1 – Impact of HEIs on Regional Economies

It was reported that a dissemination event on outcomes from the research programme on *Impact of HEIs on Regional Economies* had been held in Cardiff on 6 October. It had been a very positive event, and had provided a good deal of helpful material which could be used in various contexts.

3 The Role of the Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales

- 3.1 Professor John Harries, Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales, gave a presentation on the role of the Chief Scientific Advisor and his future priorities as they relate to the HE sector.

3.2 John Harries commented that, during his first five months in post, he had had extensive discussions across government, industry, HE 3rd sector and schools in Wales. He had found lots of enthusiasm and many initiatives, and some very good research. However, it is sometimes hard to see the overall pattern and plan, and there is a danger that there are too many activities on too small a scale. There is a need for Wales to have an agreed overarching strategy, and also to be more effective with monitoring and project management. His most urgent priorities are:

- to establish a Science Advisory Council for Wales
- to revise and update the 2006 Science Strategy.

3.3 John Harries suggested that possible ways of raising standards of R&D in STEM in Wales might include:

- deciding whether or not to try and cover the whole spectrum of research from fundamental “blue skies” to applied
- attracting new stars
- focusing on areas of strength (and discontinuing weaker areas of activity)
- collaborating with the best inside and especially outside Wales
- using the National Science Academy to good effect, to provide leadership for the STEM agenda and bring people together.

3.4 Options for building strong alliances within Wales might involve:

- merging departments
- strengthening selected departments with extra funding/new stars
- identifying winning subjects
- sponsoring joint HE-industry institutes
- developing a regional focus (e.g. for Medicine/Bioscience, Environment, Optics).

3.5 It is also essential:

- to link world-class excellent science with innovation and enterprise, aimed at economic renewal
- to recognise the strength of natural clusters of HEIs, industry, NGOs, and government, and mixtures of the four sectors
- to bring new resources into Wales from UK, Europe and beyond, to expand the knowledge economy, with particular focus on driving new commercial enterprises.

3.6 Members welcomed John Harries’ analysis of the current situation, much of which chimed with the Committee’s own experience. The following points were made in discussion:

- There was agreement that there is a need to focus on the big picture, rather than getting bogged down with multiple small funding schemes.
- It was noted that WAG is increasingly keen to pursue a “whole government” approach in Wales, as evidenced, for example, by the involvement of three Ministers in the launch of the Economic Renewal

Programme. There are real opportunities to achieve greater synergies between funders.

- Members agreed that, in addition to collaborating within Wales, Welsh HEIs should maximise opportunities to collaborate with leading institutions elsewhere in the UK. It was noted that such collaborations had already led to particular successes in European funding schemes. Richard Davies commented that, whilst there is a role for collaboration, the overall scale of institutions is also important.
- On the question of basic versus applied research, Phil Gummatt commented that HEFCW's research funding is intended to reward research excellence, irrespective of whether it is basic or applied. More generally, it was noted that there is a need for a balance between maintaining a reasonably broad research base and specialisation: there is a danger that if the research base becomes too specialised, it will not be able to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges. Phil Gummatt commented that HEFCW's core research funding is intended to support a reasonable breadth of activity, whilst its discretionary funding focuses on Science Policy and ERP priority areas.

3.7 In conclusion, John Harries emphasised that he was keen to work closely with the RIE Committee, and it was agreed to add him to the distribution list for papers.

4 Economic Renewal Programme

4.1 The Committee received for information a copy of a discussion item presented to HEFCW Members on 24 September 2010, which invited the Council to consider the implications arising for HE from the publication of the Assembly Government's new economic policy document, *Economic Renewal: a new direction* (commonly known as the *Economic Renewal Programme* or *ERP*).

4.2 The Chair invited Roger Carter to report to the Committee the outcomes of the Council's discussion of the *ERP*. Roger Carter drew attention to the following points:

- Synergies between the *ERP* and *For our Future*;
- The extent to which HEFCW's Corporate Strategy for 2010-11 to 2012-13 reflected *ERP* priorities;
- The intention to align the next cycle of Innovation & Engagement Funding (2011/12 to 2013/14) to effective delivery of *FoF* and *ERP* objectives;
- The Council's wish that the RIEC should consider what more HEFCW might do:
 - to stimulate greater business demand for HE services;
 - ensure HE sector is properly engaged with ERP Sector Panels;
 - help raise awareness of Wales as "an attractive place to do business".

- 4.3 Further to the final bullet point above, the Committee noted receipt of a tabled paper from Dr Tove Oliver, HEFCW's Europe and International Manager, which provided detailed consideration of the way in which the international dimension of HE has a role to play in making Wales an attractive place in which to invest and do business.
- 4.4 Continuing with the theme of Wales as an attractive place to invest in, the Chair next invited business member, Professor David Walker, to talk to the Committee about his company's investment in Wales.
- 4.5 Dr Walker explained that he was the Research Director of Zeeko Ltd, a company had spun out of the optical science laboratory at University College London. In 2007 Zeeko Research Ltd was established at the OpTic Tecnum in St. Asaph and Dr Walker took the Committee through the reasons why it was decided to locate the new company in North Wales (its parent company being located in Leicester). These were ease of access to:
- an existing industrial optics cluster;
 - appropriately skilled people;
 - output of R & D ideas from the local university (ie Glyndwr);
 - a university with a genuine desire to engage with industry and a mature attitude to knowledge transfer as a two-way process;
 - local funding schemes (SMART Cymru in particular) making it attractive on the basis of cost as well;
 - quality of life considerations (including transport links to London and via the A55 to airports at Manchester and Liverpool)
- 4.6 Whilst drawing particular attention to a solid working partnership between Zeeko research Ltd and Glyndwr University (which now also operated the Techium facility in St Asaph, Dr Walker also noted that a high proportion of the STEM staff needed by the company came from overseas.
- 4.7 The Chair then invited Nina Park, a business representative on the Council to describe her (Mid-Wales based) company's experience of working with the Welsh HE sector. Ms Park noted that whilst the company had had a positive past relationship with the local further education institution, Coleg Powys, it was increasingly looking overseas for appropriately skilled staff of the right calibre. However, the reluctance of trade unions in Wales to encourage/support up-skilling and CPD within the existing workforce was also cited as another factor for the recruitment of new staff from overseas. In terms of interactions with the HE sector in Wales, Ms Park reported that following unsuccessful overtures made to a Welsh HEI following the company's establishment in 2004, the company now looked to HEIs in England for the services it required.
- 4.8 In terms of *ERP* ambitions to make Wales an attractive place in which to do business, Members contrasted the experiences of David Walker's and Nina Park's companies and noted the damage that could be done to the development of potentially productive relationships when a HEI failed to respond appropriately to a first approach from business. Geraint Jones undertook to discuss this issue with the WILOs network in the context of the

current development of an A4B portal to facilitate business access to HE expertise and services in Wales. Members also noted the extent to which access to skills affected the investment decisions of businesses, ie R & D intensive businesses were just as interested in available talent flows as local HE R & D expertise.

- 4.9 Dr Alastair Davies reported that the re-structuring of the WAG's Department of Economy & Transport in the wake of the *ERP* would not be completed before the end of November 2011. However, he was confident that the structure to be put in place would continue to facilitate strategically joined up working between HEFCW and the WAG in support of the sector's role both in economic development in general and, more specifically, in helping existing businesses to grow and new businesses to invest in Wales. It was also agreed that the RIEC's Research Sub-group should be asked to consider the implications of the *ERP*, including how to ensure appropriate HE representation on the proposed Sector Panels.

5 Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research

- 5.1 The Committee received a paper on the *Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research*, a set of principles drawn up by the UK funders of research in recognition of the importance and value of public engagement with research. It was noted that HEFCW would be a signatory to the Concordat, alongside the other UK HE/funding bodies and RCUK. It was envisaged that further briefing on the Concordat would be provided to the Committee at a later date.

6 Establishment of an Innovation and Engagement Sub-Group

- 6.1 The Committee discussed the possible establishment of a fixed-term Innovation and Engagement Sub-Group, along the same lines as the Research Sub-Group. It was noted, however, that this could cut across a number of other developments currently in train in Wales, including the establishment of the DE&T sector panels, and it was therefore agreed to defer establishment of the Sub-Group for the time being.

7 Recent Reports Relevant to Research and Engagement

- 7.1 The Committee received, for information, a paper relating to a number of recently-published reports which were relevant to the work of the Committee.

8 Minutes of the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee held on 8 July 2010

- 8.1 The Committee received, for information, the Minutes of the meeting of the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee held on 8 July 2010.

9 Interim Report of Research Sub-Group

- 9.1 A copy of the interim report of the Research Sub-Group was tabled for information. It was noted that the full report would be discussed at the January meeting of the Committee.

10 Any Other Business

- 10.1 There was no additional business.

11 Dates of Future Meetings

- 11.1 It was noted that future meetings of the Committee would be held as follows:
- Friday, 21 January 2011
 - Thursday, 14 April 2011
 - Tuesday, 28 June 2011
 - Thursday, 13 October 2011