

**Minutes of the first meeting of the Learning and Teaching Committee held
Wednesday 29 April 2009 in HEFCW Offices, Llanishen.**

Present:

Members: Prof Leni Oglesby, Member of Council (Chair)
Ben Gray, NUS Wales
Stephen Griffiths, NLIAH
Jacqui Hare, Higher Education Wales (HEW) nominee
Rob Humphreys, Open University in Wales
Julie Lydon, University of Glamorgan
Dr Peter Noyes, HEW nominee
Dr Carl Peters, UCET Cymru
Professor Danny Saunders, University of Glamorgan
Richard Spear, NIACE Dysgu Cymru
Prof Alan Speight, Chair of Reaching Wider Partnerships
Dennis Thomas, Aberystwyth University
Gavin Thomas, Fforwm
Pauline Thomas, Member of Council

Observers: Simon Brown, Estyn
Dr Julian Ellis, Quality Assurance Agency
Mike Hopkins, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning
and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government
Gabriel Jezierski, on behalf of Sean Mackney, Higher Education
Academy
Dr Ioan Matthews, Centre for Welsh Medium Higher Education
Lisa Newberry, Higher Education Wales
Roger Thomas, HEFCW Chairman

Officers: Dr Alison Allan
Dr David Blaney
Celia Hunt
Jane Johns
Gemma Long (Clerk)
Dr Tove Oliver
Dr Cliona O'Neill (Secretary)
Dr Alyson Thomas

Apologies: Professor Mari Lloyd-Williams, Michelle Creed, Sean Mackney.

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the first meeting of the Learning and Teaching Committee under its new wide-ranging remit.
- 1.2 Members were reminded of the need to declare their interests to HEFCW, and to make their own arrangements for a substitute to attend meetings on their behalf if they were unable to attend. They were reminded that any substitute had to be from the same constituent group and notified to HEFCW in advance of the meetings.

2 REMIT AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (LTC/09/01)

- 2.1 Members received and considered the remit and terms of reference of the Committee, and noted that
- the remit of the Committee was wide, and covered all matters relating to learning and teaching in higher education (HE), including quality assessment and enhancement, skills, widening access, initial teacher training, and Welsh medium provision.
 - smaller task and finish groups would be formed as subgroups of the Committee to address specific issues as required.
- 2.2 Members agreed with both the remit and the terms of reference of the Committee, and noted that the Committee would also receive minutes from the HEFCW Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee. Officers would ensure that appropriate links were made between the common agendas of these committees.
- 2.3 It was agreed that the Committee's priorities were to identify strategic objectives and developments within its remit which could be undertaken by HEFCW as its contribution to enhancing the cultural, intellectual, and economic life of Wales.
- 2.4 The Chair invited members to reflect on the suggestions for a new name for the Committee given the changes in its remit and/or to suggest alternative titles.
- 2.5 Resolved: *to*
- i) accept the broader remit and terms of reference of the committee;*
 - ii) submit suggestions for an alternative committee name to the Secretary by Monday, 4 May.*
 - iii) appoint Professor Mari Lloyd-Williams as deputy chair of the Committee.*

3 CONTEXT FOR THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

- 3.1 The Committee received a presentation on the context for the Committee's work and potential future directions for the sector. In relation to the aims and objectives set out in the presentation it was noted these were to be set against the principles underlying the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for public services, i.e. citizens (learners/students) at the centre; equality and social justice; economies of scale; and value for money. It was agreed that

in order to evaluate the outcomes of initiatives to support its work it would be necessary to clarify the performance indicators and benchmarks to be used for assessment.

3.2 It was noted that:

- HEFCW's Remit letter from the Welsh Assembly Government for 2009-10 had only recently been received and had been tabled for the Committee.
- The outcomes of the second phase of the Jones' review and the refresh of the *Reaching Higher* strategy would inform HEFCW's corporate plan and future activities.

3.3 Members considered the issues outlined against the current economic climate and agreed that:

- the HE sector should publicise its strengths, and highlight the activities it already carries out that contribute to helping to mitigate the economic downturn.
- Widening Access and the skills agenda were key, and overlapping, priorities.

3.4 Members agreed that the Committee should bear in mind the relationship of Wales to the international and global context as graduate employment destinations extended far beyond Wales.

3.5 It was recognised that despite the diversity of HE provision in Wales, some institutions would share similar challenges. In order to address these efficiently and effectively across the country a greater degree of collaboration between HEIs would be necessary. Whilst recognising that a balance between competition and collaboration had to be struck, the Welsh medium agenda was an exemplar of how collaboration could be very effective.

3.6 The Committee considered the impact on HE of other Welsh education policies such as 14–19 learning pathways, foundation degrees, and the transformation agenda. Members agreed that HEIs had a major role in these agendas and that the Committee should be used to make sure that HE was playing its role in realising these policies. Members agreed that partnership working between higher and further education would be key and that HE strategic approaches would need to cohere with the work of other education sectors.

3.7 Resolved: *to*

- note HEFCW's remit letter from the Welsh Assembly Government for 2009-10;*
- bear in mind the relationship of HEIs to the Welsh, UK, international and global education context.*

4 POSITION PAPERS ON AREAS COVERED BY THIS COMMITTEE
(LTC/09/02)

4.1 Position papers on areas covered by the Committee's new remit, setting out the current developments and issues for the future, were introduced by the

4.2 Learning and Teaching

4.2.1 It was noted that the Committee's role was to advise the Council on all matters relating to learning and teaching in higher education with the aim of ensuring that provision meets the needs and expectations of learners and other stakeholders. Members agreed there was a need to clarify which among a number of strategic priorities should take precedence, in order that HEIs should not be subjected to 'initiative overload', and that the development and use of performance indicators or benchmarks to assess progress would be determined in the light of those priorities. Members noted that 'success' was defined differently for different groups of students; for example, in the Health sector it was defined as the proportion of students both completing their programmes successfully and taking up employment in the health sector.

4.2.2 It was commented upon that, in the current economic climate, the need for cost-effectiveness and efficiency gains would come more to the fore, and this would increase the challenge to provide an excellent learning and teaching experience for students.

4.2.3 It was noted that the Committee needed to recognise further:

- the needs of the growing number of part-time and non-traditional students.
- the work of the HE Academy, and, in particular, the HE Academy Subject Centres (SCs) which were making valuable contributions to quality enhancement in learning and teaching in the UK. It was felt that there was scope for them to engage further with Wales, and Members agreed they would like to see data on institutional engagement with SCs at a future meeting. The HE Academy's role in supporting research-informed teaching was also identified as beneficial to quality enhancement.
- the roles of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and with Lifelong Learning UK to share expertise in terms of education workforce development.

4.2.4 Members commented that:

- the skills agenda should not be narrowly defined, as the needs of the workplace changed continually
- it was important to identify what skills people needed to equip them for contemporary life and employment, including studying for small numbers of credits, rather than whole awards, given that many people continued to learn throughout their lives.
- there was much jargon used in respect of credits and qualifications, which was not easily accessible to, or understood by, employers or potential students in the workplace.

- if HEIs were to have the flexibility to act quickly and responsively to meet the needs of students and employers it was important they should retain the independence and autonomy to do so.
 - HE provision should reflect the possibilities for graduate employment in a Wales, UK, and the global market.
- 4.2.5 Members considered that there was scope for Welsh HEIs to engage more with the Internationalisation agenda, and noted that an International HE Strategy for Wales was being developed by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 4.2.6 Linked to this, members expressed concern that some important initiatives in Wales, eg Go Wales, were dependent on European funding and consideration needed to be given to longer term support for such work in the area of learning and teaching following cessation of this funding
- 4.2.7 *Resolved: that further papers to the Committee on Learning and Teaching matters would take account of the issues identified above.*
- Agreed: that data on HEIs engagement with HEA SCs be considered at a future meeting.*
- 4.3 Quality Assessment, Assurance and Enhancement
- 4.3.1 HEFCW's statutory responsibilities with regard to quality assessment, assurance, and enhancement of HEIs' learning and teaching provision are met through a service level agreement with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and members noted the Committee's role in relation to these matters.
- 4.3.2 Members were advised that:
- the QAA draft handbook for the revised institutional review process would be published for consultation in May, and that it incorporated a greater focus on quality enhancement.
 - the developmental reviews of HE in FE carried out in 2007/08 had been received positively, in comparison to other quality assessment processes, by the colleges undergoing review.
- 4.3.3 Members noted that the QAA was working towards reducing the burden of assessment, and in areas where there was more than one regulator the QAA was working to reduce duplication in the review process. Members welcomed the collaboration between the QAA and Estyn in assessing the provision of Initial Teacher Training, and agreed that a similar approach might be useful for healthcare subjects. The QAA representative undertook to investigate whether this was possible.
- 4.3.4 Members agreed with the contents of the position paper and asserted that the quality assessment and assurance processes were working effectively in Wales.
- 4.3.5 It was noted that the current institutional review process excluded small pockets of HE in FE provision directly-funded by HEFCW. It was felt to be desirable to have an overview of all provision, particularly HE in FE, to

identify opportunities to take forward quality enhancement across all post-16 education sectors.

4.3.6 *Agreed: that the QAA would investigate whether it was possible to collaborate with relevant agencies for the quality assurance of healthcare subjects to reduce the burden of assessment.*

4.4 Skills and Employability

4.4.1 Members agreed that it was important to clarify how the skills agenda would be dealt with across two strategic committees of HEFCW, and that this would be the responsibility of the HEFCW officers.

4.4.2 The HEFCW Remit letter provided clear signals regarding the skills agenda. Members agreed that it was essential for HE to work with the Sector Skills Councils in order to achieve a more comprehensive picture of employers' needs with regards to higher level skills.

4.4.3 In the light of the economic downturn the Welsh Assembly Government had put in place a package of rapid response measures but had no plans to refresh the paper on 'Skills that work for Wales'. Members noted that both this document and the Leitch Review were written in a very different economic climate, and that WAG may well have to question previous assumptions about the shape of the future workplace given that the reality may well be very different to that predicted previously. The Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) had noted that FEIs and HEIs each needed to make important decisions regarding the activity areas in which they should invest. A member requested that WAG colleagues provide a short briefing on the significant sector priorities identified by the Ministerial Advisory Group.

4.4.4 Members noted that there is a bilingual context to the skills and employment agenda, not necessarily directly connected to Welsh medium provision but as a requirement for workforce planning. For example, there may be implications for individuals who did not study through Welsh but who were required to work bilingually. The work of Welsh for Adults Centres, largely based in HEIs, was important to this skills agenda, as were opportunities for HEIs to develop niche markets for employment-related skills training through the medium of Welsh.

4.4.5 Members agreed that Universities were a key partner in the process for WAG's plans for addressing the current economic downturn, and that it was important to emphasise this. The forthcoming Welsh Assembly Government economic summit would focus on the role of FE and HE in addressing the downturn.

4.4.6 *Resolved: that*

(i) *it was essential for HE to work with the sector skills councils in order to achieve a full picture of employers' needs with regards to skills, and how the sector could contribute to addressing the issues.*

Action: that

- (ii) *HEFCW officers would clarify how the skills agenda issues would be dealt with across the strategic committees of HEFCW;*
- (iii) *WAG colleagues would be asked to provide a short briefing on the significant sector priorities identified by the Ministerial Advisory Group.*

4.5 Widening Access

4.5.1 Officers reported that they were awaiting the outcomes of the Jones' review and the Higher Education Academy review of Widening Access strategies to inform HEFCW's future widening access strategy development. Council had agreed that institutions' widening access strategies should be rolled forward for a further year to take account of these circumstances.

4.5.2 HEFCW's 2009-10 remit letter outlined a wide range of issues relating to widening access, requiring action and/or advice. Members agreed to consider widening access in more depth at the June 2009 Committee meeting.

4.5.3 Members noted that:

- raising educational aspirations and skills in communities, families, schools and in individuals was a long-term agenda which required a long-term funding commitment.
- retention-related issues and value for money needed to be taken into account when considering widening access strategy developments.
- the outcomes and recommendations of the National Audit Office report '*Staying the Course: the retention of students in higher education*' for England, had particularly included an emphasis on holistic reporting by institutions on all widening access activity and funding streams.

4.5.4 Members agreed that it was appropriate for HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government to continue with a focus on widening access for all ages and geographical regions, particularly where the take-up rates remained low. They queried whether sufficient students from widening access backgrounds were being admitted into priority subjects in Wales, and into those professional fields which carry a high salary on qualification. They also queried whether widening access activities offered sufficient progression routes to vocational learning opportunities. Members also requested further discussion, at the next meeting, on widening access collaborative activities, including those with FE partners, and on part-time pathways.

4.5.5 Members noted that four Welsh HEIs were among the bottom twenty listed by HESA as having the lowest retention rates and suggested that it was important to define carefully what was meant by 'retention' within a credit-based system.

4.5.6 *Agreed: that widening access issues, including retention, would be considered in more depth at the June 2009 Committee meeting*

4.6 Initial Teacher Training

- 4.6.1 The importance of HEFCW's specific statutory role and responsibilities on initial teacher training (ITT) for primary and secondary schoolteachers and WAG's requirement for a reconfiguration of ITT, dating from 2006, was outlined to the committee.
- 4.6.2 It was noted that reconfiguration had dominated HEFCW thinking and activity regarding ITT for the past few years. In light of this, members agreed that there should be a focus on supporting the establishment of the three strong regional teacher education centres, and recognised that the centres would not be homogeneous. They noted that the delay in confirming transitional funding had delayed work for some time.
- 4.6.3 Members requested that training and staff development in the post-compulsory education field, given the important role it had to play in the skills agenda, should be considered by this Committee, although HEFCW had no statutory responsibility in this area. They also noted that, in this context, the definition of ITT was too narrow, and did not take into account the needs of the wider skills sector.
- 4.6.4 It was reported that Estyn had consulted on its common inspection framework which would be operational from 2010-11. The proposals included a reduced level of activity, and a greater emphasis on institutions' self assessments, within an approach that would take performance and self-evaluation into account.
- 4.6.5 Members raised a concern that, following the impetus provided by the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN), Wales should do more to build capacity to answer a need for further educational research to underpin the development of Welsh education policy and to raise Wales' distinctive education profile internationally. They confirmed that WERN's activities and future policies to develop educational research capacity were of interest to the Committee.
- 4.6.6 *Resolved: that further papers to the Committee on ITT and continuing professional development would take account of the issues identified above.*

4.7 Welsh Medium Provision

- 4.7.1 Members recognised and commended Welsh medium developments in higher education to date, and the increased opportunities that existed for students as a result.
- 4.7.2 It was reported that:
- the establishment of the sector framework and national development plan for Welsh Medium provision led by the Welsh Medium Higher Education Sector Group, under the auspices of Higher Education Wales, had provided a big step change, and had led to a more strategic and structured approach to Welsh Medium provision, including prioritisation of subject areas for development.
 - The Federal College Planning Board had met between October 2008 and March 2009 and the Chair would report to the Minister in June on possible models for the College. The Minister's response would inform the future work of HEFCW and the Committee.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 Members expressed a preference to receive committee papers electronically as well as in printed form.
- 5.2 It was noted that there would be 4 meetings of the Committee a year, and each meeting would include a themed strategic discussion, and business items.
- 5.3 HEFCW officers would canvas committee members for dates for meetings in 2010.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 6.1 The next meeting would be on 26 June, to start at 11 am, and finish by 3 pm.

7 CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE FINAL LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE MEETING, 16 JANUARY 2009 (LTC/09/03)

- 7.1 The confirmed minutes of the Council's former Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) held on the 16 January 2009 were presented for information.
- 7.2 *Resolved: to note the minutes of the former Learning and Teaching Committee.*

8 CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE FINAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING, 5 OCTOBER 2007 (LTC/09/04)

- 8.1 The confirmed minutes of the Council's former Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) held on 5 October 2008 were presented for information.
- 8.2 *Resolved: to note the minutes of the former Quality Assessment Committee.*

9 CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE FINAL WIDENING ACCESS COMMITTEE MEETING, 22 OCTOBER 2008 (LTC/09/05)

- 9.1 The minutes of the Council's former Widening Access Committee (WAC) held on 22 October 2008 were presented for information.
- 9.2 *Resolved: to note the minutes of the former Widening Access Committee.*