

Minutes of the third meeting of the Council's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee held Wednesday 21 October 2009 in HEFCW Offices, Llanishen.

Present:

Members: Prof Leni Oglesby, Member of Council (Chair)
Michelle Creed, Alliance of Sector Skills Councils
Katie Dalton, National Union of Students, Wales
Jacqui Hare, Higher Education Wales (HEW) nominee
Meri Huws, Welsh Medium Higher Education Sector Group
Prof Mari Lloyd-Williams, Member of Council
Julie Lydon, institutional representative
Dr Peter Noyes, HEW nominee
Prof Danny Saunders, institutional representative
Richard Spear, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Dysgu Cymru
Prof Alan Speight, Chair of Reaching Wider Partnerships
Dennis Thomas, institutional representative
Gavin Thomas, Fforwm
Pauline Thomas, Member of Council

Observers: Dr Julian Ellis, Quality Assurance Agency
Sean Mackney, Higher Education Academy
Dr Ioan Matthews, Centre for Welsh Medium Higher Education
Greg Walker, on behalf of Lisa Newberry, Higher Education Wales

Officers: Dr David Blaney (item 1 only)
Celia Hunt
Jane Johns
Dr Cliona O'Neill (Secretary)
Dr Alyson Thomas

Apologies: Dr Carl Peters, Simon Brown, Stephen Griffiths, Rob Humphreys

1 SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY (SETQC/09/15)

1.1 The Committee received a paper on skills and employability setting out the current scene in terms of Welsh Assembly Government policy, summarising recent HEFCW activity in this area and the wider context, and introducing the presentations and discussion session. Presentations were given by Alyson Thomas (HEFCW), Jackie Cresswell-Griffith (HEFCW), Danny Saunders (Wales Employment and Skills Board) and Michelle Creed (Alliance of Sector Skills Councils).

- 1.2 Members considered a range of questions in relation to skills and employability. Officers confirmed that members' advice to Council on these issues would be collated and appended to the SETQC minutes as **Annex A**.
- 1.3 Members debated whether some of the third mission funding, which is currently largely unhypothecated, should be tied to the delivery of specific policy imperatives in relation to skills and employability. They noted the risks of hypothecating funding at too great a level of detail. They noted that HEFCW's consultation circular would be published imminently and advised that HEFCW allocate the funding on the basis of agreeing outcomes which would be monitored via the third mission strategies.
- 1.4 Members also debated how we might demonstrate the economic impact of HEI activity in relation to skills provision and graduate employability, as required by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) in its remit letter to HEFCW. They suggested that it might be useful for the HE sector in Wales to carry out applied research in this area, but noted other work being jointly funded by the ESRC and the UK funding bodies, *Impact of HEIs on Regional Economies*, was due to report in a year. They noted that the need for a better understanding of the impact of HE was an issue of UK-wide interest, and agreed that any standard input-output model would need to be supplemented by HEIs with appropriate qualitative narrative, and that broader measures, for example of wellbeing, social justice, etc should also be taken into account. In this context, it was noted that HEFCW's GO Wales programme already captures this kind of information that could be used to illustrate the value of its specific interventions.
- 1.5 Resolved:
- i) to produce a report summarising the conclusions of the discussions, to be appended to the minutes of the meeting (Annex A);*
 - ii) Advise that funding for skills should not be hypothecated within the HEFCW Third Mission fund;*
 - iii) HEFCW to consider further how the economic impact of HEI activity in relation to skills provision and graduate employability might be demonstrated, including through ongoing studies from other organisations.*
- 2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (SETQC/09/16)
- 2.1 Members agreed the minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting.
- 2.2 Resolved:
- i) to accept the minutes as a true record of the meeting held on 26 June 2009.*

3 MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 Item 2.2 - Higher Education Academy review of widening access strategies (2006 to 2009) and Reaching Wider proposals (2008 to 2010) would be published imminently, and would be followed by a HEFCW/HEA/sector strategic dialogue in November 2009.
- 3.2 Item 2.3 - Members had considered a series of widening access policy-related questions and advice to Council on the future development of widening access policies, including the Reaching Wider initiative. SETQC advice had been collated and appended to the SETQC minutes as Annex A.
- 3.3 Item 2.4 and 4.5.1- HEFCW would be invited to submit data on a range of HE issues, including widening access, to inform WAG's development of its response to the Jones' Review. This was likely to be a high level document and further work would then be required to determine actions and measures. HEFCW's submission would include outcomes from the November 2009 HEFCW/HEA/sector strategic dialogue. The Minister was expected to report on 25 November 2009.
- 3.4 Item 4.2.1 - The Academy would confirm whether the report on subject centre engagement with HE institutions would be available for the October meeting. Officers had been informed that the timescales meant it could not be provided for this meeting, but it would be available for the January 2010 meeting.
- 3.5 Item 4.3 – A meeting had been held between the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (NLIAH) and HEFCW regarding the quality assurance of healthcare provision. The NLIAH member would be invited to provide feedback at the January 2010 meeting.
- 3.6 Item 5.6 (ii) - The QAA would develop scenarios for the review of collaborative provision in the institutional review process to run from 2009, which it would share with institutions at a briefing event planned for early February 2010.
- 3.7 Item 6.8(ii) – Following SETQC's request for additional information in the institutional review handbook on the role of student reviewers, their appointment and training, the QAA would address the matter at the February 2010 briefing event. If necessary, following that event, they would publish further guidance.

4 HIDDEN COSTS OF STUDY (SETQC/09/17)

- 4.1 This item invited members' comments on our review of the hidden costs of study, as our remit letter from WAG required us to report on this area. However committee members felt that the use of the term 'hidden costs'

was inappropriate. It was felt that it conveyed an impression of intent, whereas it was more usually the case of either students not being fully aware of all costs or of underestimating these.

- 4.2 NUS Wales noted that they were very happy about the remit letter request as students tend to underestimate the costs of studying, and this might impact on the retention of low income students. They noted the importance of identifying smaller costs which accumulate, in order to increase transparency and make it easier for students to understand the range of expenses which they may incur. Officers confirmed that the work was intended to reflect the interests of both part-time and full-time students.
- 4.3 Members reported that currently there was no evidence regarding the impact of these underestimated costs on the retention of students. They advised that the steering group for this work should consider the information that is currently provided by HEIs for prospective students.
- 4.4 The QAA noted that its code of practice on admissions to higher education notes the principle that institutions should 'inform applicants of the obligations placed on prospective students at the time the offer of a place is made'. The document also noted that, 'In addition to full and accurate information about all fees and associated costs of studying a particular programme, prospective students may find it helpful for institutions to include information on the availability of institutional specific advice and sources of financial support.'
- 4.5 Members noted that similar issues were also concerns of the other funding bodies of the UK. They suggested that, within the Teaching Quality Information (TQI)/National Student Survey (NSS) steering group review of information needs and of a common approach to publishing key institutional information, HEFCW recommend the inclusion of transparency of costs, including those which students tend to under-estimate.
- 4.6 A member reported that WAG was undertaking a review of advice, guidance and support provided for learners in Wales, and that it would be useful for this work to link with that. Members also noted that the study would link with the development of the National Bursary Framework, in which NUS Wales was involved.
- 4.7 Resolved:
- i) *The steering group would:*
 - a. *ensure that the work reflected the interests of part-time and full-time students;*
 - b. *consider how to reflect the title of 'hidden costs' in the advice to WAG;*
 - c. *investigate whether there was any evidence regarding the impact of underestimated costs on retention of poorer students;*
 - d. *consider the information that is currently provided by HEIs for students regarding total costs of study;*
 - e. *link with the Wales Employment and Skills Board review of Careers Wales 'Information, advice and guidance';*

- f. *link with the National Bursary Framework work in which NUS Wales was engaged;*
- ii) *Officers would investigate whether the TQI/NSS review of information needs could encompass costs of study.*

5 WIDENING ACCESS (SETQC/09/18)

5.1 This item scoped HEFCW's widening access draft remit letter response to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills which took into account the deliberations of members on widening access at the last meeting (Annex A to the minutes of the meeting of 26 June (SETQC/09/16). Members were invited to advise officers of any key omissions or additional actions which might be taken to improve widening access policy implementation beyond 2010. HEFCW would provide the advice to the Minister in December 2009 or January 2010, shortly after the Welsh Assembly Government published its response to the Jones' Review.

5.2 Members noted:

- Para 23 (iv) should read March 2010 (not 2009);
- Para 27 – the reference to HE as being 'easier' than finding employment currently, related to push and pull factors for staying in HE, rather than implying that HE was an 'easy option'. The reference should be rephrased to make this clear;
- HEFCW was remitted to use core funding more strategically and proposals were currently under consultation. Studies had looked at the use of retention premia across the UK. It would be useful to examine the consultation in this context;
- When considering future widening access strands of activity, workforce development and workbased learning activities should be borne in mind to raise skills levels (see the skills map in the second Jones report);
- While recognising that more should be done to widen access for adults, HEFCW anticipated retaining the all-age RH target. It would be important to ensure that, in developing adult widening access provision further, widening access work with schools and communities was not lost ;
- Students who did not complete their whole qualification might have benefitted from their HE experience in terms of knowledge and skills in order to make an increased contribution to the economy, however non-completion of a qualification, if this was not the original intention, could also have negative effects on learners;
- Wales had a good track record regarding widening access, and it remained important to contribute to the equality and diversity agenda through widening access;
- HEFCW's remit letter referred to refreshing initiatives rather than starting new ones, and given limited resources, officers were considering a more targeted focus to its widening access work.

5.3 Members identified that Welsh medium (WM) provision was not referred to in the paper, nor in the response covering the agenda beyond 2010. This

was partly because there was a lack of clarity regarding the targets that would be set by the Assembly regarding this provision and because HEFCW was committed to embedding Welsh medium work and ensuring it was a cross-cutting theme in all widening access developments. HEFCW officers wished to ensure that Welsh medium widening access provision was targeted at areas of multiple deprivation. They agreed the importance of not losing a WM target, and of not isolating WM issues within the Coleg Ffederal proposals.

- 5.4 Members remained committed to a regional approach to widening access and Reaching Wider work, recognising this approach was aligned with key Welsh Assembly policies and priorities. They noted the potential to shift to using local authority areas as a widening access skills measure, rather than Communities First areas. However, they concluded that for comparability of data over time it was not desirable to make this shift, particularly given that there is substantial variability within a single local authority area.
- 5.5 Members agreed that it would be necessary to prioritise issues and focus on specific aspects of widening access, rather than continuing to address a wide spread of target groups.
- 5.6 Resolved:
- i) *Welsh Medium provision should be considered in the HEFCW response;*
 - ii) *SETQC would receive at its next meeting, for information, HEFCW's remit letter in response to the widening access issues outlined above.*

6 QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN ENGLAND (SETQC/09/19)

- 6.1 This item provided an update on quality and standards issues being discussed in England.
- 6.2 Members noted that some of the issues emerging from reports in England were UK sector-wide, and some were specific to the QAA itself. The UK-wide issues included external examiners, student contact time, and public information, including the public-facing role of the QAA.
- 6.3 Members noted that Universities UK (UUK) would lead a consultation on what a new Quality Assurance Framework for England might look like. Again, some of the outcomes of this would impact on other countries of the UK.
- 6.4 UUK were in the process of selecting members and a chair for a group to debate changes to the external examiner system. The HEW observer would brief the SETQC regarding timescales of this work once the group was formed. HEW was ensuring that the group included Welsh representation. The Committee supported Wales' participation in the UK-wide discussions and advised that careful consideration should be given before opting out of any suggested solutions.

- 6.5 Members noted the ongoing complex debate around the student experience in HE and the range of public misperceptions regarding higher education. They agreed that the January 2010 meeting should look more strategically at the student experience in Wales and how it could be enhanced.
- 6.6 Members advised that the Quality Working Group (QWG) should examine areas which were identified in the report of HEFCE's Teaching, Quality and Student Experience (TQSE) sub-committee: *HEFCE's statutory responsibility for quality assurance*, as HEFCE's responsibility and other areas where they had an interest. They advised on the importance of staying abreast of thinking in England, given the potential impact of these issues on Wales.
- 6.7 Members advised that HEFCW officers with responsibility for widening access should take into account the recommended expansion of HE in FE in England as a means of widening participation in relation to Wales.
- 6.8 Resolved:
- i) *The HEW observer would brief the SETQC regarding timescales of the UUK group to debate changes to the external examiner system once known;*
 - ii) *Wales should give careful consideration before opting out of any suggested UK-wide changes to the external examiner system;*
 - iii) *The January 2010 meeting would look more strategically at the student experience in Wales and how it could be enhanced;*
 - iv) *The QWG would examine areas identified by the report of HEFCE's TQSE sub-committee: HEFCE's statutory responsibility for quality assurance, as being HEFCE's responsibility or where they had an interest; and*
 - v) *HEFCW officers with responsibility for widening access would consider the recommended expansion of HE in FE in England as a means of widening participation in relation to Wales.*

7 QAA REVIEW OUTCOMES AND ANNUAL REPORT (SETQC/09/20)

- 7.1 This item provided the outcomes of the institutional review (IR) of Swansea Metropolitan University carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education in 2008/09. It also provided a copy of the QAA's annual report to HEFCW for 2008/09 against the service level agreement (SLA) between the QAA, HEFCW and Higher Education Wales.
- 7.2 Members noted the outcomes of the IR of Swansea Metropolitan University, which contained a reference to reviewing procedures for collaborative activity and which had been a feature of a few IR reports in recent months in the UK. The QAA observer suggested that HEIs examine the outcome reports for these institutions to see what the issues had been, and whether they identified any matters for consideration in Wales.

- 7.3 Members commended the successful outcome of the IR for Swansea Metropolitan University.
- 8 QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND THE QUALITY WORKING GROUP (SETQC/09/21)
- 8.1 This item updated members on quality enhancement matters and invited views on progress to date. It also provided the minutes of the April and July 2009 meetings of the Quality Working Group (QWG) for information.
- 8.2 Members debated the desirability of Wales participating in the National Teaching Fellowship Awards (NTFAs). The Academy observer reported that the scheme had the effect in England of improving the status of teaching, institutions were able to use it in their marketing, and that fellows benefited from networking in an association of national teaching fellows.
- 8.3 Members identified concerns that Wales was, and individual staff members were, missing out on an opportunity to raise the profile of learning and teaching excellence in Wales. This had been debated by the HEW Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching Advisory Group at its September meeting. Members of that Group noted that they would have liked the option also to apply for project funding in addition to the NTFAs, as they thought partial engagement might be perceived as a weak engagement with the scheme. Officers noted that this was an option, but with funding of up to £200k per project, this would involve top-slicing other learning and teaching funding. The Academy observer noted that it was by no means clear that the project strand would continue long-term in England.
- 8.4 The NTFA scheme would have management costs of ca £10k, and awards cost £10k each, which would be used by recipients for personal development in learning and teaching. Members agreed that if money was available, they would be in favour of Wales participating. However, they did not want Learning and Teaching Strategy Funding to be topsliced for this. They advised that they would like HEFCW to explore raising the profile of learning and teaching in Wales, and access to funding for this.
- 8.5 The PVC Group had suggested a 'college of peers' as an alternative, but there was as yet a lack of clarity regarding costs for this or what it would involve. Members noted the continuing professional development scheme operated for school teachers by the General Teaching Council for Wales, and noted that HE could investigate participation in this. However, officers noted that funding was also an issue for this scheme. Members concluded that, given that all the options involved funding, the HEA UK-wide scheme would be preferable to a Wales-only scheme. The Chair would report the views of the Committee to Council.
- 8.6 A Member noted that Welsh Medium provision should always be integrated with normal quality assurance procedures.

- 8.7 Members agreed that student engagement, including the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) should be added to the draft circular on HEFCW's approach to quality enhancement.
- 8.8 Resolved:
- i) If funding were available, members would be in favour of Wales participating in the NTFAs;*
 - ii) Members would prefer the funding not to be topsliced from Learning and Teaching Strategy Funding;*
 - iii) HEFCW would explore raising the profile of learning and teaching in Wales, and access to funding for this;*
 - iv) An HEA UK-wide scheme to raise the profile of learning and teaching in Wales would be preferable to a Wales-only scheme;*
 - v) The Chair would report the views of the Committee regarding the NTFAs to Council; and*
 - vi) Student engagement, including the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) would be added to the draft circular on HEFCW's approach to quality enhancement.*
- 9 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2009: UPDATE (SETQC/09/22)
- 9.1 This item provided for discussion the outcomes of the 2009 National Student Survey (NSS). Members agreed that Wales should be congratulated on the commendable results achieved.
- 9.2 NUS Wales reported they were pleased to see improvements in the results for Assessment and Feedback in Wales. They noted that the decrease in satisfaction for the statements 'the timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned' and 'I have been able to access general IT resources when I have needed to' may have been due to the fact that the student population is changing, with increasing numbers of part-time students and non-traditional learners, who may have different needs with regards to timetabling and IT resources.
- 9.3 Members noted that, whether or not they agreed with the survey methodology, the results reflected students' views and therefore should be noted. They noted the importance of the student experience, and that the enhancement and improvement of this would be discussed more strategically at the next meeting.
- 9.4 Members noted that the student experience analysis carried out previously of Wales in the context of the UK as a whole had been of interest, and it would be useful to see an updated piece of work on this. They advised that HEFCW should ask the TQI/NSS steering group whether it would be possible for the planned updated analysis of the results to facilitate this.
- 9.5 The Academy noted that it was doing subject by subject analysis to enable the subject centres to address areas of concern in institutions. The Academy was also carrying out analysis at sector level on surveys of the

post-graduate taught and research student experience. The Deputy Chief Executive would speak on these areas at the January 2010 meeting.

9.6 Resolved:

- i) *HEFCW would ask the TQI/NSS steering group whether it would be possible for the forthcoming analysis of the NSS results to facilitate the comparison of outcomes for Wales with those in other parts of the UK, including by type of institution;*
- ii) *The Academy Deputy Chief Executive would speak at the January 2010 meeting on its subject by subject analysis of the NSS and on its analysis of surveys of the taught and research postgraduate experience.*

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 There was no other business.

11 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

11.1 The next meetings would be held on 20 January 2010; 24 March 2010; 8 July 2010.

12 UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 JULY 2009 (SETQC/09/23)

12.1 The unconfirmed minutes of the Council's Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee held on 7 July 2009 were presented for information.

12.2 Resolved:

- i) *to note the minutes of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee.*

13 USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING AND TEACHING (SETQC/09/24)

13.1 This item provided an update on the use of technology in learning and teaching and an update on HEFCW's support of the Welsh Video Network (WVN) Support Centre, following a review commissioned by HEFCW and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) within the Welsh Assembly Government, for the information of members

13.2 Resolved:

- i) *to note the use of technology in learning and teaching and HEFCW's support of the WVN Support Centre.*

14 EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP CONFERENCE GLYNDŴR UNIVERSITY (SETQC/09/25)

14.1 This item provided a summary of the HEFCW Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) Conference held at Glyndŵr University on 9 July 2009.

14.2 Resolved:

- i) to note the report on the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Conference held at Glyndŵr University on 9 July 2009.*

15 SUBJECTS OF BROADER IMPORTANCE TO WALES – DEVELOPMENTS IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES (SETQC/09/26)

15.1 This item provided information on recent developments undertaken by HEFCW to encourage the promotion and take up of Modern Foreign Languages in Wales at higher education level.

15.2 Resolved:

- i) to note HEFCW's engagement in the refresh of the Assembly's Languages Count strategy; and*
- ii) to note that Welsh HEIs have agreed to participate in the Routes into Languages scheme to form Routes Cymru Consortium aimed at promoting language learning.*

Signature.....

Date.....