

**Minutes of the fourth meeting of the Council's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee held Wednesday 24 March 2010 in HEFCW Offices, Llanishen.**

**Present:**

**Members:**

Prof Leni Oglesby, Member of Council (Chair)  
Dennis Thomas, institutional representative (item 2 onwards)  
Julie Lydon, institutional representative (item 2 onwards)  
Jane Williams, representing Rob Humphreys, institutional representative  
Jacqui Hare, Higher Education Wales (HEW) nominee  
Dr Peter Noyes, HEW nominee  
Prof John Parkinson, UCET Cymru  
Richard Spear, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Dysgu Cymru  
Stephen Griffiths, National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare  
Gavin Thomas, ColegauCymru

**Observers:**

Dr Julian Ellis, Quality Assurance Agency  
Mike Hopkins, Welsh Assembly Government (item 1 only)  
Dr Ioan Matthews, Centre for Welsh Medium Higher Education  
Peter McAllister, Welsh Assembly Government (item 1 only)  
Lisa Newberry, HEW (item 1 only)  
David Sadler, Higher Education Academy  
Jane Woodley, Welsh Assembly Government (item 1 only)

**Officers:**

Dr David Blaney  
Celia Hunt  
Jane Johns  
Gemma Long (Clerk)  
Dr Cliona O'Neill (Secretary)  
Dr Alyson Thomas

**Apologies:** Michelle Creed, Katie Dalton, Pauline Thomas, Rob Humphreys, Meri Huws, Sarah Lewis, Prof Mari Lloyd-Williams, Prof Danny Saunders, Prof Alan Speight.

1 FOUNDATION DEGREES

- 1.1 The Committee received presentations on Foundation degrees (FDs), setting out the background in Wales, the rationale for increasing FD provision, and the challenges to be addressed by the sector. The Committee noted the importance of FDs for Widening Access (WA) and progression, addressing the needs of commerce, and increasing the skills of the workforce.

- 1.2 Celia Hunt, Head of Strategy, Learning and Funding at HEFCW presented the background to FDs in Wales and described the quality assurance arrangements developed for these qualifications.
- 1.3 Peter McAllister, Head of Higher Education Strategy, Policy and Governance at the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), advised that it was an important agenda for SETQC and HEFCW in terms of progressing *For our Future (FOF)* priorities, since FDs would be central to HE delivery of the skills agenda and regional planning, as set out in the 2010-11 HEFCW remit letter. The procedure for FE institutions to acquire foundation degree awarding powers (FDAPs) was being developed by the Assembly in consultation with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The Privy Council would consider applications made for FDAPs. FDs would be included within the regional planning framework as they would target the needs of employers within an identified area. Additional students numbers were available both through the pan-Wales European funded Foundation Degree proposal, led by Glamorgan, and the University of the Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI).
- 1.4 Jane Woodley, Head of Transformation Policy at WAG, discussed FDs in the context of the skills agenda in Wales, focussing particularly on UHOVI. WAG expected that partnership between HE and FE would be a two-way engagement seeking to deliver FDs via a regional planning framework. This would require clear articulation of partnerships between learners, providers and employers, to reflect and meet local and regional needs of the private and voluntary sectors.
- 1.5 Gavin Thomas, ColegauCymru, outlined the current provision of HE in FE. This focuses on vocational qualifications. ColegauCymru would welcome more systematic links between HE and FE, the regional approach to workforce development, greater opportunities for local, part-time and full time study, and clearer progression to HE from FE.
- 1.6 Members discussed issues arising from the presentations and agreed that there must be a balance between learner and employer demand. It was necessary to communicate the importance of FDs to all stakeholders, including learners and employers, and to identify specifically what FDs would offer that was not already provided by HE or FE, to meet the demands of employers, and of those accessing HE through vocational qualifications. Promoting FDs was recognised as a challenge given budget constraints, though there were suggestions of alternative sources of funding. In addition, the value of FDs needed to be communicated to HEIs to ensure they were as valued as other qualifications.
- 1.7 Issues identified by Members in relation to quality were as follows:
  - confirmation of the quality of provision would be important in establishing the market for foundation degrees;
  - FDs were not a re-badging of Higher National Diplomas but were expected to meet the QAA Foundation Degree Benchmark;

- it was too soon to evaluate FDs in Wales, given the lack of policy steer to date, but Wales should learn from the reviews and practices in England and Northern Ireland;
- a developmental review of FDs in Wales might be appropriate; and
- reviews of HE in FE should include all HE provision, not just directly funded elements.

1.8 Matters relating to employer engagement included the following:

- effective delivery of foundation degrees would include engagement with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), including increasing employer awareness;
- there were challenges to funding employer engagement, including the need for sufficient employer engagement to provide a critical mass of students for FDs;
- institutions should respond to proven demand;
- there was a need to build demand from both employers and students over time;
- members were eager to build on existing relationships between HEIs and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in developing FDs;
- it would be beneficial for WAG to recognise the role of SSCs in providing feedback on employees with FDs;
- all stakeholders needed to consider what the needs of the workforce would or might be in 3-4 years, as well as meeting current demands;
- employers were interested in the skills delivered via FDs, rather than in the qualification itself;
- employers needed to understand how FDs would meet their skills needs in order to build the demand over time;
- access to FDs could be widened by the accreditation of prior learning;
- some employers do not currently recognise FDs as an access route or a form of continuing professional development, but have developed alternative training and development in collaboration with HE; and
- All developments regarding FDs needed to take account of the bilingual/Welsh medium education agenda.

1.9 Resolved:

- i) *recommend that officers consider the matters discussed in developing the HEFCW Corporate Strategy and operational plan; and*
- ii) *recommend that officers consider commissioning a developmental review of FDs in the future.*

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (SETQC/10/14)

2.1 Members agreed the minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

2.2 Resolved: *accept the minutes as a true record of the meeting held on 20 January 2010.*

### 3 MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 Item 3.6 – HEFCW’s Quality Working Group would meet in summer 2010 and report to SETQC at its October meeting.
- 3.2 Item 5.6 – Guidelines for HEIs regarding Costs of Study had been published following the approval of the Welsh Assembly Government, and had been provided to the members of the UK-wide TQI/NSS Steering group.
- 3.3 Item 6.10 (ii) – HEFCW, the HE Academy and the Centre for Welsh Medium Higher Education had met to discuss the role of the Academy in progressing the agenda for Welsh Medium in Higher Education.
- 3.4 Item 8.6 – HEFCW was establishing a Shadow Board for the Coleg Ffederal.
- 3.5 Item 9.6 (i) – HEFCW would give institutions specific information on the future of part-time student funding in the coming weeks.

### 4 INTERIM ANNUAL REPORT OF SETQC (SETQC/10/15)

- 4.1 Members received the draft interim annual report of the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee for consideration. They were invited to submit comments on structure and content to the Secretary.
- 4.2 The final version of the report would be provided to the October meeting of the Committee.
- 4.3 Resolved: *submit comments and amendments to the Committee Secretary by end of April 2010.*

### 5 REMIT LETTER (SETQC/10/16)

- 5.1 The Committee received HEFCW’s remit letter from the Minister for Children, Education, and Lifelong Learning for 2010-11.
- 5.2 The Committee agreed that its role included providing views on the remit letter to inform the development of HEFCW’s Corporate Strategy. It would provide feedback on specific matters via strategic discussion items and via the committee meetings, as required.
- 5.3 Whilst appreciating the intent of the remit letter, members identified the following points which might impact on its objectives:
- The Committee was supportive of the tone and strategic direction regarding the Heads of the Valleys project but expressed concerns that the targets might not appear to be realistic without further details;
  - the remit set by the Assembly would be difficult to achieve, both for HEFCW and HEIs, given the challenges to budgets in Wales;

- There was no reference to developments in the other parts of the UK which could impact on Wales HE, particularly the review of fees in England;
- a cap on student numbers might have unintended impacts, eg on widening access and specific subject areas;
- An over-emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects could distort recruitment, given weaker student demand;
- The impact of distributing 80% of funding via the Strategic Implementation Fund might distort the work of institutions with regards to ordinary business and the student experience, and it would be hard to maintain stability;
- It might be difficult to implement the Welsh medium strategy satisfactorily in a shifting landscape;
- There was no reference to international excellence, and only a narrow reference to internationalisation; and
- The deadline for providing the Minister with an evaluation of the QAA's Institutional Review findings from the University of Wales (UW) could not be met, as the review of UW would be in October, and the earliest indications of outcomes would not be available until November.

5.4 However, it was recognised that:

- priorities would be protected by premia eg, Welsh medium provision, widening access;
- the cap would not operate on the current admissions cycle;
- HEFCW would provide details of the implementation of the cap to institutions when available; and
- Being responsive to employers extends far beyond part-time provision.

5.5 Resolved:

- i) *The Committee's role included providing views on the remit letter in order to inform the development of HEFCW's Corporate Strategy, and it would provide feedback on specific matters via meetings, as required; and*
- ii) *Officers would discuss the scope and timing of the deadlines with Assembly officials.*

## 6 WIDENING ACCESS (SETQC/10/17)

6.1 This paper invited Members to advise on the widening access aspects of HEFCW's Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2010-13, to meet the Assembly's *For our Future* expectations. This paper had been written prior to recent receipt of HEFCW's remit letter. It also presented the proposed terms of reference for the widening access task and finish group. The work of the group would inform the development of a HEFCW widening access approach.

- 6.2 The Committee had received comments from one member by correspondence, relating to widening access for postgraduate students. Officers confirmed that widening access principles should also be taken into account in relation to postgraduate students and that they would be included in the overall approach, as funding priorities allowed.
- 6.3 Members commented on the proposed 'learning success' target. One member suggested that it might be difficult to identify a measurement for this. Members recognised that targets, if not robust, were generally open to interpretation, and this should be taken into account at the outset. Officers reported that the proposed targets sought to identify performance measures around the FOF widening access expectations to deliver social justice and student success and retention.
- 6.4 Whilst recognising that the focus on Community First (CF) areas should continue, Members recognised that it was difficult and challenging to widen access in CF areas and to plan and deliver widening access within a regional framework (15 (v) and 15(vi) respectively). They noted that there were other deprivation indices relevant to widening access and encouraged officers to take them into account in developing robust measures of success. One member also stressed the need to consider whether the broad 'all age' approach adopted in the previous strategy period encouraged sufficient engagement with older learners.
- 6.5 Members confirmed that there should be an agreed definition of widening access.
- 6.6 Resolved:
- i) Officers would take account of the advice of the Committee in the context of developing HEFCW's Corporate Strategy;*
  - ii) Officers would reflect on the progress to be made in engaging older learners and to invite the SETQC task and finish group to consider this further; and*
  - iii) Members were invited to provide any additional points electronically to the Secretary or paper author by mid-April.*
- 7 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS (SETQC/10/18)
- 7.1 The Committee received the draft HEFCW circular on widening access to higher education for refugees and asylum seekers and was invited to comment and advise of further action that should be taken to support this agenda.
- 7.2 The circular was developed in response to a request set out in the HEFCW remit letter for 2009-10. Its development had included consultation with the sector and related agencies.
- 7.3 The Committee advised that it would be useful to clarify which other surveys supported the papers' findings (para 14). Members thought that the 'lack of knowledge and/or information' referred to in para 23 should be

clarified. This issue might be the result of existing information being too generic and/or to these groups experiencing difficulties in accessing it.

- 7.4 Members welcomed the references to community groups and voluntary work, and suggested that these were given more prominence. They also identified that there should be more detail on HE and FE collaborative work in this area.
- 7.5 Resolved: *Officers would take account of Members' comments prior to publication of the circular.*

## 8 REGIONAL STRATEGIES (SETQC/10/19)

- 8.1 This paper provided a HEFCW consultation circular containing proposals for developing a regional dimension to the planning and delivery of higher education. Members were invited to comment on the proposals.
- 8.2 The paper set out the concept of HEIs contributing to planning within a region to try to reduce duplication of provision and address gaps in these areas to the benefit of the learner. It was not the intention that activities between institutions in different regional areas should cease.
- 8.3 The Committee identified the following points in relation to consultation question 1<sup>1</sup>:
- members queried the rationale behind the definition of regions and questioned whether Wales was large enough to deliver on a regional basis;
  - it would be necessary for planning and delivery of the regional dimension to consider the role of the Open University, which operated on a pan-Wales basis, and lacked the resources to operate 'regionally' in three different regions;
  - other institutions also held pan-Wales roles regarding their provision (eg Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Medical provision, etc) and this needed to be considered within the regional context;
  - the regional structure identified matched that used in the further education sector;
  - the delineations did not match other boundaries used;
  - the boundaries between regions should be porous and not constrain institutions, as not all activities would fit into the regions defined;
  - some institutions worked regionally already, and this had not been recognised; the regions covered in this work may not be the same as those identified in the consultation circular;
  - the regions might overlap from the student perspective, eg regarding local provision and distances that students were willing to travel to access HE;

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<sup>1</sup> Do you support the definition of 'region' which we are adopting? If not, please set out your alternative proposal and the evidence for this

- the pan-Wales Coleg Ffederal (CFf) would be affected by current HE developments, including the regionalisation agenda; and
- the regions identified were a reasonable compromise but HEFCW should continue to note caveats already stated in using these regions.

8.4 The following issues were identified in relation to consultation question 2<sup>2</sup>:

- There would be an imbalance between regions, as each region would have varying socio-economic groups, levels of demand, etc;
- there would need to be a balance between the need of regions and the resource allocated, including taking into account imbalances between regions;
- a sound evidence base was required in order to determine need
- the timescales for implementing the regional dimension would constrain planning and consultation with employers ;
- the definition of 'local delivery' as 45 minutes travel to study time may not be appropriate in a Welsh context;
- there would be consultancy support to facilitate institutions in undertaking this new approach; and
- the learner voice was important in determining regional need.

8.5 The following issues were identified in relation to consultation question 3<sup>3</sup>:

- It was important for institutions to continue to engage internationally, and there were concerns that the requirement to work regionally would over-burden HEIs and reduce their international engagement;
- proposals did not refer to the voice of students, on whom the proposals may impact;
- the FE sector had found operating regionally to be beneficial, supported employer engagement and collaboration, and helped in the identification of needs and partnerships;
- successes in regional approaches eg Welsh medium education, in one region had proved beneficial on a pan-Wales level, and so the regional approach might have pan-Wales benefits;
- it would be a challenge to identify measurable performance indicators that would enable appropriate allocation of funding for the regional dimension;
- funding needs to be sufficiently flexible to enable pan-Wales benefits to be experienced;
- the large numbers of plans and strategies which HEIs had to develop and respond to could lead to an approach which was not holistic; and
- the response to the consultation should emphasise that the regional approach is not intended to constrain HEIs to work only within their region

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<sup>2</sup> Do you support the way in which we expect regional 'need' to be identified? If not, are there other factors which should be taken into account?

<sup>3</sup> Do you support the way in which we plan to take forward the planning and delivery of higher education through the use of regional strategies? If not, are there any amendments which you would wish to suggest or do you have an alternative approach to recommend?

8.6 The Committee concluded that members understood the pressure to undertake a regional approach and supported HEFCW in implementing this agenda. They would like HEFCW to be bold in its response to the regional agenda, noting that the primary concern was to ensure that learners engage with HE, whether or not this was within their own region.

8.7 Resolved: *Officers would take account of Members' views in taking forward the outcomes of the consultation.*

## 9 HIGHER EDUCATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES (SETQC/10/20)

9.1 This paper invited Members to comment on additional information on the quality assessment of HE in FE, either through the Institutional Review: Wales (IR) process; a review of collaborative provision, or a hybrid process; or through the review of directly funded HE in FE provision.

9.2 The QAA Officer at the meeting spoke to the set of scenarios developed by the QAA to illustrate the selection of review method. The QAA reported it would seek to determine the nature and complexity of an institution's collaborative arrangements before negotiating review method with the institution. In the instance of UW, QAA had considered a number of factors including that the UW had a large amount of collaborative provision which was not considered complex and therefore a hybrid review would be appropriate.

9.3 Members considered that these scenarios met the recommendation set out in *Circular W09/01HE: Recommendations for the Institutional Review: Wales from 2009/10*, that 'Large or complex collaborative provision should be subject to a separate collaborative provision review (CPR) or enhanced IR.' [para12 (iii)]. However, there was concern that the criteria would be interpreted differently over the review cycle, and a risk that the criteria would not be applied equitably.

9.4 Members debated whether the mechanism enabled HEFCW to meet its statutory responsibilities. Officers reported that the messages from England were that collaborative provision was inherently higher risk and might not be secure. It was also noted that the QAA had included recommendations about collaborative provision in institutional reviews in Wales to date. Members considered that there was no evidence that the current three-pronged approach was not managing risk.

9.5 In considering the assessment of directly-funded HE in FE, Members noted that a review of foundation degrees would not cover all directly funded provision (DF). They recommended that if DF was of concern with regards to HEFCW's statutory responsibilities, that all DF should be reviewed separately. As stated in item one, members considered that any review of FDs should be developmental and enhancement focussed in the first instance.

- 9.6 Members expressed concerns that any requirement to undergo additional review procedures would put pressure on quality assurance teams in institutions.
- 9.7 Resolved:
- i) members considered that the scenarios for the selection of review method for collaborative provision met the recommendation set out in Circular W09/10HE;*
  - ii) members considered that the mechanism enabled HEFCW to meet its statutory responsibilities;*
  - iii) any review of FDs should be developmental and enhancement focussed in the first instance;*
  - iv) to agree with the QAA's recommendation that FE colleges wishing to apply for FDAPs should be advised to go through a summative review first;*
  - v) Members were comfortable with the timescales identified in Annex B;*
  - vi) FDs and DF provision should not be reviewed by the same process; and*
  - vii) note the publication of QAA outcomes reports.*
- 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 8 July 2010; and 7 October 2010.
- 12 UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2010 (SETQC/10/21)
- 12.1 The unconfirmed minutes of the Council's Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee held on 20 January 2010 were presented for information.
- 12.2 Resolved: *to note the minutes of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee.*
- 13 ENHANCING LEARNING AND TEACHING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY IN WALES (THE GWELLA PROGRAMME) – GWELLA ANNUAL REPORT (SETQC/10/22)
- 13.1 This item provided an update on the use of technology in learning and teaching. The Higher Education Academy supported the work of institutions engaged in HEFCW funded programme on activities in relation to

*Enhancing Learning and Teaching through Technology: a Strategy for Higher Education in Wales.* The Programme of activities – the Gwella project –provided its second annual report to the Committee

- 13.2 Resolved: *to note the publication of the Gwella annual report.*
  
- 14 EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP – REGIONAL CENTRES OF EXPERTISE UPDATE. (SETQC/10/23)

  - 14.1 This item provided an update on the progress made by the Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) Wales in securing recognition from the United Nations University.
  - 14.2 Resolved: *to note the establishment of RCE Wales and the collaboration between Swansea University and University of Wales, Newport to support it.*

- 15 UPDATE ON INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING (SETQC/10/24)

  - 15.1 This item provided an update on developments in initial teacher training, including intake targets for 2010/11, the review of secondary undergraduate provision, and the transfer of responsibility of the Graduate Teacher Programme Scheme to HEFCW.
  - 15.2 Resolved: *to note the update on Initial Teacher Training.*

Signature.....

Date.....