

**Minutes of the eighteenth meeting of the Council's Student Experience,  
Teaching and Quality Committee (SETQC) held from 12:30pm on 29 January  
2014 at HEFCW's offices, Llanishen.**

**Present**

**Members:** Professor Leni Oglesby, member of Council (Chair);  
Stephen Griffiths, National Health Service Wales, Shared Services  
Partnership representative;  
Rob Humphreys, Open University representative;  
Professor Ewart Keep, skills and employability representative;  
Stephanie Lloyd, National Union of Students (NUS) Wales President;  
Professor Julie Lydon, institutional representative;  
Professor April McMahon, Higher Education Wales (HEW)  
representative;  
Hannah Pudner, part-time student representative;  
Professor Alan Speight, institutional representative;  
Dr Greg Walker, Colegau Cymru representative;  
Gareth Williams, Sector Skills Council representative;  
Dr David Wright, institutional representative.

**Observers:** Lizzie Badrick, Higher Education Academy (HEA);  
Rachel Cable, HEW;  
Ruth Hayton, Welsh Government;  
Heather Jackson, HEA;  
Dr Ioan Matthews, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

**Officers:** Jackie Cresswell-Griffith;  
Celia Hunt;  
Jane Johns;  
Rachel O'Gorman;  
Dr Cliona O'Neill (Secretary);  
Steve Williams (Clerk).

**Apologies:** Dr Julian Ellis, Quality Assurance Agency;  
Bethan Guilfoyle, member of Council;  
Dr Helena Lim, HEA;  
Professor Clive Mulholland, HEW representative;  
Lisa Newberry, HEW;  
Richard Spear, adult education representative;  
Gavin Thomas, Colegau Cymru representative.

**Welcome and introductions**

The Chair:

- Welcomed Professor Gareth Rees from the Welsh Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD);
- Welcomed Lizzie Badrick and Heather Jackson from the HEA and Rachel Cable from HEW.

## Strategic Discussion

### 1. Towards an evidence base for widening access to HE

- 1.1 This paper provided an introduction and context for a presentation by Professor Gareth Rees on interim findings from a HEFCW funded project being undertaken by WISERD to develop an evidence base for widening access to higher education (HE).
- 1.2 The aims of the project were to understand better:
- The patterns of participation (entry and progression) in HE in Wales;
  - The strengths and weaknesses of current policies and practices with respect to widening participation.
- 1.3 The interim findings were:
- There was little to distinguish the Welsh patterns of WA from those in England;
  - Educational attainment was strongly related to HE entry and progression;
  - Students who entered HE from the disadvantaged areas (Communities First or POLAR2) progress in their HE programmes as well as those from other areas;
  - It was too early to suggest that Welsh Government's approach to student finance had impacted on the social class background of those students entering HE;
  - There was a very broad range of widening access activity and different rationales underpinning such activity.
- 1.4 It was clarified that there was no evidence that previous increases in tuition fees had impacted on the class background of those students entering HE. It was too early to say what the impact of the £9k tuition fees would be on widening access to HE as it had been the largest fee increase since the introduction of tuition fees. Indications were that the biggest determinant on the entry and progression into HE, with regards to student finance, was the cost of living.
- 1.5 The Committee was advised that the project tracked students who had graduated in 2013 from achievement of their GCSEs. It was recognised that there would be difficulties interpreting the data of those students who entered HE at other stages of education. It was noted that:
- There were substantial problems with the data set provided by the Welsh Government, which the team were using;
  - The outcomes were dependent on the modelling techniques used.
- 1.6 Members reported that an internal study at another HEI in Wales revealed similar results to WISERD in relation to the progress of students from disadvantaged areas alongside those from more traditional backgrounds. It was suggested that this could be evidence of the success of widening access policies. The Committee was advised that it was important to note that the

success of these widening access policies was determined by where those students achieved their pre-HE academic attainment.

1.7 Resolved: To

- i) *Note the aims and deliverables of the HEFCW WISERD Widening Access grant funding;*
- ii) *Note the policy and process issues arising from the WISERD Widening Access grant-funded evidence based project;*
- iii) *Note the Widening Access conference to be held on 1 May 2014;*
- iv) *Invite Professor Rees to attend SETQC in the future to present the final evidence of the project.*

**2. Minutes of the October 2013 meeting**

2.1 Members agreed the minutes of 23 October as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

2.2 Resolved:

- i) *Accept the minutes as a true record of the meeting held on 23 October 2013.*

**3. Matters Arising**

3.1 The paper presented a report on action taken following the SETQC meetings held on 23 October 2012, 22 May 2013 & 23 October 2013. In addition to the points noted in the paper, the following points were raised in relation to the matters arising:

23 October 2013

- 3.2 Item 3.5 It was reported by members who had attended, that the Welsh Studies event had generated positive ideas which would need resources to progress. There was a concern, for some Members, that there would not be the political will or resources to progress these ideas with a different Minister than had remitted HEFCW to undertake this task. Officers noted that the discussions from the event would be written up and provided to those that attended the conference for comment before being shared with SETQC.
- 3.3 Item 3.8 iv) The Committee was advised that it was Professor Merfyn Jones not Professor Merfyn Hughes, as reported in the paper, who had provided an academic perspective at the Welsh Studies event.
- 3.4 Item 7.5 iv) & v) Members were advised that HEFCW's statistics team would need more time to establish the information on the A-level grade profile of Welsh domiciled students being accepted to English HEIs and the impact of the drop of further education participation from Communities First areas on HE recruitment. These would be brought to a future meeting.
- 3.5 Resolved to:
  - i) Note the contents of the paper.

#### **4. Draft Widening Access Strategic Approach 2013/14 to 2015/16**

- 4.1 This paper presented the draft Widening Access Strategic Approach for 2013/14 to 2015/16.
- 4.2 Officers noted that steers from SETQC had been considered following the October 2013 meeting and advice had also been received from the Council at its November 2013 meeting on the advisability of strengthening the references to enhanced technology and also student partnership. The Committee was reminded that the Corporate Strategy widening access targets within the Approach document had been agreed by Welsh Government, following consultation with the sector with the text informed by HEFCW statisticians, to ensure accuracy.
- 4.3 In reference to paragraph 44, members noted that it had been difficult for HEIs to negotiate with employers to fund additional educational opportunities.
- 4.4 Some members expressed concern regarding the broad range of the Approach; however officers cautioned against too narrow an Approach which might not fit all HEIs' mission and purpose in relation to HE. Members suggested prioritising activities on what could be achieved.
- 4.5 The Committee recognised that consistency was important, from the student perspective, between the political and institutional positions on the importance of widening access, and on the resources committed to it.
- 4.6 Members advised that the document should promote sector WA activity, what HEIs should aspire to do and what should be done to enhance provision.
- 4.7 The Committee noted that there was no further information regarding the On-line Digital Learning working group report. The Welsh Government observer agreed to report back to the Committee on further developments.
- 4.8 This paper had been circulated electronically to the Research Innovation and Engagement Committee for its advice, before being revised and submitted for approval and publication.
- 4.9 Resolved:
- i) *To note the HEFCW Widening Access Strategic Approach 2013/14 to 2015/16;*
  - ii) *To note SETQC's comments on whether the Widening Access Strategic Approach measures appropriately addressed the Corporate Strategy key strategic theme;*
  - iii) *To take account of SETQC's comments in finalising the Widening Access Approach;*
  - iv) *That the Welsh Government Observer would report back to SETQC on the outcomes of the On-line Digital Learning working group report.*

#### **5. HEFCW's Draft Part-Time Higher Education Position Statement**

- 5.1 This paper presented an early draft of HEFCW's Part-Time Higher Education Position Statement, developed, in part, to inform HEFCW's response to the

Diamond Review, and respond to consultation responses on the part-time action plan.

5.2 Members welcomed the document and its vision, but some members also questioned the potential effectiveness of the document in delivering change in a context where the full-time fee and funding structure provided HEIs with greater financial incentives to recruit full-time students. It was queried whether the statement should be stronger in its approach.

5.3 Members noted and advised that:

- The 40% drop of part-time students in England indicated the impact of the funding regime on the uptake of part-time places.
- Radical steps were needed for strengthening the part-time higher education system, and it was suggested that these steps should be set out in the document.
- Greater reference should be made to work based learning and higher level apprenticeships. Employer engagement was core to any future plan of action for part-time study.
- There were challenges in improving the market profile of part-time HE.
- HEFCW should 'promote the success' of part-time HE in Wales rather than 'ensuring the success' (para 8).
- There would still remain issues in establishing an equitable funding regime while part-time HE continued to be viewed more as an adjunct to full-time policy development and funding arrangements.
- Ensuring the flexibility of provision was important, covering module, on-line and distance learning provision, weekend and evening provision.

5.4 Members recognised that part-time, as a study mode, was relevant to both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and this should be taken into account in developing the draft to cover the sustainability of both study levels.

5.5 Resolved:

- i) To note the part-time action plan consultation responses;*
- ii) To note HEFCW's intentions in developing the position statement;*
- iii) To take account of Council's, SETQC's and RIEC's advice in finalising the statement prior to re-submitting it to Council for approval.*

## **6. Fee Planning**

6.1 This paper presented the recent consultation published by HEFCW on the Fee Plans for 2015/16 and invited views.

6.2 Officers advised that legal advice had been received and it had been confirmed which of HEFCW's Corporate Strategy targets could be included in the Fee Plan. It was intended that the inclusion of these targets would encourage the sector to focus more on sector wide national priorities in a context of tuition fee income but decreasing levels of HEFCW funding.

- 6.3 Officers confirmed that the fee plan was a statutory provision and it was not the intention to move towards an outcome based approach as had been established in Scotland where there was no provision for fee plans or access agreements. It had been designed to be a transparent approach that was evidence based.
- 6.4 Members agreed that there should be a dialogue on the fee plans focussed on how each HEI could contribute to the sector targets taking account of the provision and mission of each HEI. This would recognise the differences between the HEIs in Wales and which HEIs had greater room for improvement, although members cautioned that this might not result in the achievement of national targets, particularly given the current changing context for higher education.
- 6.5 Some members suggested that guidance needed to be clearer on how students' unions could work more closely with HEIs to take the Fee Plans forward.
- 6.6 Resolved:
- i) *Officers would take account of SETQC's comments on the fee planning consultation to contribute to the development of the proposals.*

## **7. Minutes of the first meeting of the Skills and Employability Board**

- 7.1 This paper presented the minutes of the first meeting of HEFCW's Skills and Employability Board and invited members to raise any issues as appropriate.
- 7.2 Members suggested that the Federation of Small Businesses and a Trade Union representative should be included on the Board, as well as the expectation that a representative of the CBI would be present.
- 7.3 Members advised that there needed to be a two-way discussion between employers and those in education in order to make progress. It would be beneficial to identify the needs of large and small/medium employers and enterprises to engage them in this process.
- 7.4 It was reported that NUS UK had identified employability as a key area for further action.
- 7.5 Resolved:
- i) *Officers would take account of SETQC's comments on the minutes of the Skills and Employability Board.*

## **8. Higher Education Academy Grant Letter 2014/15**

- 8.1 This paper invited members to provide advice on priorities for HEFCW's 2014/15 grant letter to the HEA.
- 8.2 Officers reported that comments from the SETQC would inform the content of the UK and Wales section of the HEA grant letter. HEFCW had agreed with the HEA that its annual reporting against the grant letter would be more analytical and have a stronger focus on the impact of its activities.

8.3 Officers advised that it was the intention to discuss with the HEA whether they would be able to advance the ideas raised at the Welsh Studies event in a multi-disciplinary workshop. The HEA observer reported that the HEA had previously provided a similar activity for cross disciplinary Islamic Studies in the UK.

8.4 Members suggested that:

- The range and depth of work being done in the Future Directions' work strands could be clearer and emphasised more in the document;
- Paragraph 8.5 of the paper should be rephrased to "becoming much more effective at helping students recognise what they are gaining from their HE experience".

8.5 Officers advised that it was important for HEFCW to support the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship network during the period that the Future Generations bill was being developed. It was reported that HEFCW would be encouraging institutions to sign up to the Welsh Government's sustainable development charter. Currently two Welsh HEIs were signatories to the charter.

8.6 Resolved:

- i) *Officers would take account of SETQC's comments on priorities for the 2014/15 grant letter from HEFCW.*

## **9. Any other business**

9.1 There was no further business.

## **10. Date of next meetings**

10.1 14 May 2014 and 1 October 2014.

## **11. Unconfirmed minutes of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee of 4 October 2013**

11.1 This paper presented the unconfirmed minutes of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee meeting of 4 October 2013.

11.2 Resolved to:

- i) *Note the unconfirmed minutes of the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee meeting of 4 October 2013.*

## **12. UCAS end of cycle 2013 report**

12.1 This paper presented a summary of the final UCAS end of cycle 2013 report for applications, acceptances and entry to HE.

12.2 Resolved to:

- i) *Note the UCAS 2013 report*

**13. Reports of relevance**

13.1 This paper provides a digest of some of the recent reports of relevance to the Committee and its remit

13.2 Resolved to:

- i) *Note the reports as background information to the work of the committee.*