

**Minutes of the twentieth meeting of the Council's Student Experience,  
Teaching and Quality Committee (SETQC) held from 12:30pm on 1 October  
2014 at HEFCW's offices, Llanishen.**

**Present**

**Members:** Professor Leni Oglesby, Member of Council (Chair)  
Beth Button, National Union of Students, Wales  
Bethan Guilfoyle, Member of Council  
Rob Humphreys, Open University Representative  
Professor Ewart Keep, Skills and Employability Representative  
Professor Julie Lydon, Institutional Representative  
Professor April McMahon, Higher Education Wales (HEW)  
representative  
Richard Spear, Adult Education Representative  
Professor Alan Speight, Institutional Representative  
Gareth Williams, Sector Skills Council Representative  
Dr David Wright, Institutional Representative  
Stephen Griffiths, NHS Shared Services  
John Grattan, Chair of PVC LTAG

**Observers:** Howard Colley, Higher Education Academy  
Colette Eley, Welsh Government  
Dr Julian Ellis, Quality Assurance Agency  
Dr Ioan Matthews, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol  
Lisa Newberry, Higher Education Wales  
Kieron Rees Part-Time Student Representative

**Officers:** Jackie Cresswell-Griffith  
Celia Hunt  
Jane Johns;  
Llinos Merriman (Clerk)  
Dr Cliona O'Neill (Secretary)  
Peter Vokes

**Apologies:** Ruth Hayton (Welsh Government)

**Welcome and introductions**

The Chair:

- Welcomed:
  - Howard Colley, Higher Education Academy;
  - Colette Eley from Higher Education Division, Welsh Government;
  - Kieron Rees, part-time student representative;
- Congratulated Julie Lydon on her OBE and Rob Humphreys on his CBE.

**Declarations of interest**

- Rob Humphreys and Beth Button were Members of the Diamond Review Panel.
- April McMahon was a Board Member of Qualifications Wales.

## **Strategic Discussion**

### **1. HEFCW's response to the Diamond Review**

- 1.1 The paper invited Members to consider the issues to be included in HEFCW's response to the Review of Higher Education (HE) Funding and Student Finance (the Diamond Review). HEFCW recognised that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were socially responsible and would respond to Welsh Government (WG) priorities.
- 1.2 The following general points were made in relation to the Diamond review, while recognising that it was difficult for HEFCW to make recommendations to influence a future model:
- It might have been helpful for the review to look at funding holistically across the HE and further education (FE) sectors, including how the education system enabled flexible learning, meeting the needs of students;
  - The challenge for the review would be to devise a system which was affordable and equitable;
  - The Health Professional Education Investment Review was considering whether the managed market should continue. The outcomes could impact on tuition fees and the fee grant, and therefore the reviews needed to be considered jointly. It was confirmed that the Chairs of the reviews were in contact;
  - Funding approaches in other devolved administrations would be considered as part of the review.
- 1.3 Members made some general points regarding HEFCW's response to the review. The response could:
- Advocate higher education, and recognise that the current fees and funding system was not working;
  - Prioritise learning and teaching/quality and WG requirements;
  - Show real leadership, recognising the social and economic needs of Wales;
  - Clarify how fee income needs to be spent, and that it did not feel as though there was a surplus money in the sector;
  - Look at investment with the best value return;
  - Be bold, imaginative and creative about solutions and achievable outcomes;
  - Focus on medium to long term outcomes and not overemphasise mechanisms;
  - Focus on 'excellence' and how this might look for example in relation to research quality, social inclusion and jobs/growth;
  - Highlight the emergence of a Higher education market;
  - Note the impact on the economy, skills and individuals' prospects as a result of HE;

- Recognise existing constraints while maintaining a bold, creative stance around current fee grant and how to better distribute it;
  - Present evidence in terms of positive outcomes of HE, in a dispassionate way;
  - Use the evidence from the evaluation of return on Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) in England;
  - Explain what could be done with more funding, in order to address the concern regarding the longer term impact of the lack of investment in the sector compared to the rest of the UK;
  - Reimagine the need for HE in Wales;
  - Raise issues which should be considered as part of the review, and model how this might be addressed.
- 1.4 A note of specific points on the HEFCW response recorded by theme is attached at **Annex A**.
- 1.5 Resolved:
- i) *HEFCW would take account of advice of the Committee in developing its response to the review.*

## **Business Meeting**

### **2. Minutes from SETQC meeting 14 May 2014**

- 2.1 Members agreed the minutes of 14 May 2014 as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising**

- 3.1 The paper presented a report on action taken following previous SETQC meeting, including an update on the SETQC outcomes and effectiveness review. The Committee discussed the effectiveness review and points cited in the minutes. In addition to the points noted in the paper, the following points were raised in relation to the matters arising.

#### October 2013

- 3.2 Item 7.5 iv): To seek information on the A level grade profile of Welsh domiciled students being accepted to English HEIs. Members confirmed that they would like to see this data, preferably on a subject destination basis. There was also reported to have been significant change in ITT recruitment as a result of the new GCSE Grade B requirement for Maths and English. It might be helpful to explore this issue in more detail, although this data was not available on HESA, and would therefore be difficult to obtain.
- 3.3 Item 7.5 v) Analyse the impact of the drop in FE participation from learners from Communities First areas on HE recruitment. Members confirmed that they would find this data useful.

#### May 2014

- 3.4 Item 4.3 (i) Publication on the Buttle Trust Quality Mark. Members noted that as the Quality Mark was being withdrawn, a circular on looked after children (LAC) would focus on what Welsh HE was doing for care leavers, and the sector's wider contribution regarding widening access to and through HE for LAC and care leavers.
- 3.5 Item 5.3 ii) Update on the NUS priority of employability. NUS Wales reported that this item had not moved forward yet, however, there was a lot of work being done centrally through NUS UK, which would raise issues regarding employability prior to the next elections. Some of this work would be adapted prior to the elections in Wales. NUS Wales was engaging in the Skills and Employability Action Plan (SEAP) work, Jobs Growth Wales and GO Wales.
- 3.6 Item 9 An update on the outcomes of the effectiveness review had been provided in the Minutes. Subject to budgetary pressures, HEFCW would seek an alternate venue for the next meeting.
- 3.7 Resolved:
- i) *HEFCW would explore the impact of the GCSE Grade B requirement for Maths and English for ITT in more detail if it was possible to access the data;*
  - ii) *Subject to budgetary pressures, HEFCW would seek an alternate venue for the next Committee meeting.*

#### **4. Implications of HE (Wales) Bill**

- 4.1 The paper invited Members to consider the implications arising from the HE (Wales) Bill of relevance to the Committee's remit. Members were invited to provide advice on its potential consequences for HEFCW in order to inform current engagement with officials and Committees in coming months.
- 4.2 Members raised the following points about the Bill more generally:
- The implementation of the bill runs to a very tight timetable, which might impact on the fee planning arrangements;
  - The Bill might have implications for SETQC's future remit;
  - It would have been helpful to carry out the Diamond Review prior to development of the HE Bill, given their interdependence;
  - Rather than developing a Bill, it might have been helpful to work on the basis of a voluntary agreement, as in England;
  - It was important to work collaboratively regarding the HE Bill and the timetable for setting fees, as any delay might impact on students and recruitment, particularly if there was greater clarity regarding fees outside Wales;
  - The HE bill was not a vehicle to address HE funding;
  - There had been an established closer working of WG, Universities Wales and HEFCW regarding the HE bill which should flag issues for clarification and feedback to HE, as there appeared to have been some areas of misunderstanding.
- 4.3 Members raised the following points regarding specific issues within the Bill:

- The Bill did not enable HEFCW to control student numbers or costs, particularly in relation to those studying in other countries of the UK. HEFCW had drawn the attention of WG to this as an issue from the seminar with Welsh Government officials in 2010 in relation to the potential impact on its budget;
- Risk assessment noted in the paper was very general and should be underpinned by a more detailed risk register;
- The Bill could change dynamics in the good partnership working currently existing between HEFCW and the sector;

#### 4.4 The following matters were clarified:

- HEFCW would rely on HEFCE's quality assessment processes in relation to Welsh domiciled students choosing to study at institutions in England. However, while the institutions remained as HEFCE-funded institutions or were designated by HEFCE HEFCW could not withdraw fee grant support for those institutions. This arrangement would be reciprocal in relation to fee loan support for English students coming to study in Wales;
- Under the Bill it appeared that HEFCW would have responsibility for FE provision offered by designated institutions including FEIs. In these circumstances, HEFCW would expect to use the outcomes of statutory Estyn inspections to evaluate the quality of this provision;
- HEFCW's engagement with FE Access to Higher Education provision should be proportionate, as this was a very small part of Further Education provision.
- The definition of quality within the Bill was vague, in terms of meeting the needs of learners. QAA would define quality as provision meeting the requirements of the quality code. It was agreed that this would be an appropriate definition for quality meeting the needs of learners;
- Institutions seeking automatic designation, and needing to submit all their provision for quality assessment would include any part-time provision and FE provision. It would not include overseas or cross border franchising under current arrangements;
- Fees and access plans were likely to focus more on activities rather than outcomes. WG confirmed that it might seek more information on activities that would lead to outcomes. Work was still being done on this area, and might affect what was covered by the 'promotion of HE' element.

#### 4.5 Areas requiring further clarification were as follows:

- Whether or not health provision counted as funded for the purposes of the Bill;
- How the automatic designation process would work;
- The timescales and means by which a quality threshold could be implemented for directly funded FE. HEFCW would meet with Colegau Cymru and other parties to progress this.

#### 4.6 WG and HEFCW would continue to resolve queries as they arose. Additionally, HEFCW would consider the impact of becoming a regulator, including in terms of Committee structures.

4.7 Resolved;

- i) *HEFCW would take account of the advice of SETQC in its ongoing engagement with officials and committees over the coming months;*
- ii) *Members would send any further thoughts they might have on the HE Bill to HEFCW by end October 2014.*

## 5. 2014 National Student Survey results

5.1 The paper provided the outcomes of NSS 2014 for discussion. A more detailed analysis had been provided than in previous years, which was welcomed by Members. The outcomes for the Open University by country were tabled, and were noted as being very positive.

5.2 The Committee noted that there had been some disruption in the sector which might have had an impact on how HE had been perceived by students. The Committee thought that there were positive trends in the sector, and particularly welcomed Bangor University's above benchmark outcome. The University of South Wales reported that it had done slightly better than anticipated, proving that mergers did not necessarily have a detrimental impact on the student experience.

5.3 Members noted the following points:

- Results could be variable from year to year, and could be impacted by circumstances within a single school or department;
- Overall, students were happy, though there were areas of lower satisfaction;
- It was not clear whether students scored their experience cumulatively or on the basis of their satisfaction around the time of the survey;
- 'Hygiene issues' (ie factors which in themselves do not give positive satisfaction, though dissatisfaction results from their absence) could impact on outcomes, resulting in substantial changes in results for some courses from year to year;
- The outcomes for part-time students differed to that of full-time students;
- Some institutions appeared to be above benchmark, but were not statistically significantly above;
- It would be useful to analyse whether socio-economic background had an impact on how experience was perceived;
- Satisfaction with the student union appeared to be low, but the wording of the question was recognised as being somewhat problematic;
- Mergers may also impact on satisfaction with student unions, due to the need for new arrangements to become embedded;

5.4 It was reported that Bangor University's focus had been on communication with the student body, looking at what had/had not been done and why; organisation, particularly for courses with large numbers of students; and attention to detail. NUS noted that the institution had a strong focus on partnership, with students knowing that their voice fed into change.

- 5.5 There appeared to be some correlation between the proportion of staff accredited on the UK Professional Standards Framework and overall satisfaction. It was apparent that course leaders were critical to standards; breadth of provision could be challenging and the impact of one or more courses that were under-performing could be high for some institutions.
- 5.6 Officers proposed writing to institutions with below benchmark overall satisfaction, and those with subject level satisfaction of 70% or less for two years or more, to ask for an action plan. Members queried whether this had an impact, and it was reported to be helpful, both in terms of demonstrating to staff that there was external interest in NSS outcomes, and in addressing HEFCW's statutory responsibilities with regard to quality assessment. Members noted that fewer subjects would need letters compared to previous years. There was also a query on whether the 70% threshold should be increased.
- 5.7 At its September meeting Council had considered that if overall satisfaction outcomes were low in specific subjects over a number of years then perhaps this provision should not be offered provision.
- 5.8 Resolved;
- i) *Officers to report the views of Members to Council via the minutes of this meeting;*
  - ii) *Officers to write to institutions with below benchmark overall satisfaction, and those with subject level satisfaction of 70% or less for two years or more, to ask for an action plan.*

## **6. Quality**

- 6.1 An updated version of the paper was tabled. This paper provided information on developments relating to quality, including an update on the Quality Assessment and Enhancement Sub-Group (QAESG), which advises SETQC on HEFCW's statutory responsibilities relating to quality.
- 6.2 The HE bill reiterated HEFCW's statutory position, but appeared to include a much stronger and comprehensive statutory responsibility placed on HEFCW, designed to cover all provision by automatically designated providers. Like England (and Scotland), HEFCW had moved away from operating exactly to the terms of the Act, with England operating the Teaching, Quality, and Student Experience Committee, and HEFCW working through SETQC (and QAESG). Given the clear reiteration of these expectations in the Bill, HEFCW was reconsidering the existing arrangements for meeting its statutory responsibilities.
- 6.3 Members noted the institutional review updates contained within the paper. They particularly noted the 'commended' outcome judgement obtained by Swansea University in relation to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.
- 6.4 HEFCW confirmed that it was providing funding for NUSW to support the sector on issues relating to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). NUSW were very appreciative of HEFCW funding this work. HEFCW had asked

institutions for information relating to UKVI during the summer, and would discuss with the QAA how the outcomes might be disseminated.

6.5 The QAA Annual Report for 2013/14 had been circulated. Members would provide any comments on this by 8 October, and agreed to delegate authority to the Chair to advise Council whether to approve the final version of the report.

6.6 Resolved to:

- i) *Note developments regarding QAESG and provide feedback regarding how HEFCW's statutory responsibilities relating to quality assessment could be taken forward in the future;*
- ii) *Note the outcomes of the institutional reviews of Cardiff University, Swansea University, and Cardiff Metropolitan University;*
- iii) *Note the outcomes of the QAA annual visit to the University of Wales;*
- iv) *Note the outcomes of the Estyn monitoring visit to the South West Wales Centre for Teacher Education and Training;*
- v) *Provide any comments on the QAA annual report for 2013/14 to the Secretary by 8 October 2014, and to delegate authority to the Chair to advise Council to approve the final version of the report;*
- vi) *Note developments in relation to UKVI;*
- vii) *Note developments in relation to transnational education.*

## **7. Evaluation of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales**

7.1 This paper provided the recommendations from the evaluation of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and invited the views of Members.

7.2 It was reported that the Office of Qualifications Regulation and Examination in England (Ofqual) would be discontinuing the use of its credit framework.

7.3 The following points were made:

- Members agreed their strong support for the CQFW, and noted its benefits for students, mobility, flexibility and part-time learning;
- The most important recommendations were considered to be
  - articulating the changing qualifications landscape in Wales and supporting the design and use of new Wales-only qualifications
  - ensuring greater senior, strategic level support for the CQFW within WG to increase its profile and use across government and the wider education and training sector
  - exploration by WG of the potential benefits and challenges of closer alignment of the CQFW with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and other EU educational tools, and recognition of informal and non-formal learning;
- Members noted that the credit framework was used on a daily basis, particularly for admissions, mobility and credit transfer;

- The CQFW was an internationally recognised framework; It should remain within WG to ensure it retains a broader perspective; It needed to be focused on continued operational effectiveness, to ensure that it remained fit for purpose (8.3 (IV)) and needed to continue to align with EQF/bologna etc.
- The most important features were in relation to admissions, mobility and credit transfer. These were used day to day and were very important tools for HEIs that benefits institutions and students.
- The Framework remains fit for purpose

#### 7.4 Resolved:

- i) *Members would send any further thoughts on the CQFW evaluation to HEFCW by 8 October.*

## 8. Computer science

8.1 This paper addressed the issue of the employability skills and employment outcomes of Computer Science graduates and proposed ways for HEFCW to help identify solutions moving forward through a separate workshop bringing together a range of stakeholders; through a panel discussion at HEFCW's scheduled skills and employability event; or through a panel discussion at a future SETQC meeting. This item was brought to the Committee in response to SETQC feedback that it would be useful to have employer panels attend meetings. Computer science was an area with potential employability issues, and was being addressed by HEFCE as a strategically important and vulnerable subject (SIVS), and also by the Scottish Funding Council.

8.2 The following points were raised:

- A wide range of areas was covered within computer science which differed in terms of entry requirements, skills, course etc. Therefore it might be better to deal with issues at a more disaggregated level;
- There might be an issue to address regarding student expectations of course content;
- There might be a gap regarding employer expectations of graduate skills, particular in relation to soft skills, which could result in a challenge to employers to fund training to address their specific needs;
- There was support within institutions for employability more generally, which could benefit this subject;
- Concern regarding HEFCW getting too involved in specific subject areas, as solutions might need to be very focussed and issues addressed very specifically;
- E-skills should be addressing issues regarding this subject and informing HEFCW of the outcomes. Any queries arising from the Wales Employment and Skills Board should be addressed by the sector. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) had not raised Computer Skills as a concern;
- It was important for HEFCW to demonstrate what HE was doing for the economy, and therefore to address issues of concern, as in other funding councils;

- HEFCW might have a role in bringing stakeholders together. It might also be useful for HEFCW to participate in the HEFCE group;
- Issues at subject level might have reputational impact, which meant it was important for HEFCW to play an active role in this work.

8.3 Resolved: to

- i) *Note the issues in relation to the employability skills and employment of Computer Science graduates and employers' perceived skills' shortages;*
- ii) *Provide any further thoughts on action which should be taken to officers by 8 October.*

**9. AOB**

9.1 There was no further business.

**10. NUSW Live Greener Report**

10.1 This paper presented the final report of the NUS Wales 'Live Greener' project, and was available via the Extranet.

**11. Date of next meetings;**

1.1 3 February 2015, 8 July 2015, 7 October 2015, at 12.30 pm.

## **Annex A**

### **Strategic Discussion: HEFCW's response to the Diamond review**

- 1.1 Postgraduate taught provision:
  - Some students were unable to pursue Masters' level qualifications due to lack of funding;
  - There were risks to the post-graduate taught (PGT) market due to perceptions of higher debt and visa issues;
  - Imaginative, bold thinking whilst maintaining consideration of affordability would be necessary to ensure sustainability of this provision;
  - Problems in Wales might be exacerbated if England resolved PGT funding issues;
  - PGT provision was reliant on overseas students although the UK is not now perceived as being welcoming to overseas students;
- 1.2 Further education, part time and flexible learning:
  - The way in which the education system supports flexible learning, meeting the needs of students and funding, went beyond analysing funding issues;
  - Cuts in funding elsewhere would impact on numbers of entrants to HE, including widening access students;
  - Mapping out changes in part time funding, including numbers of students that benefit, and how part-time provision impacted on the review;
  - Information should be sought on the cost of delivering part time courses vs full time courses;
  - The impact of funding changes for full time students on part-time provision was noted;
  - Relative costs eg, materials and field trips, differed for full time and part time students, which could influence choice;
  - The relative cost of full/part time education impacted on student choice;
  - The cost of living for students was also an important issue;
  - Clarifying the linkages between HE and the rest of the post-16 education sector would be helpful.
- 1.3 Specific courses:
  - There was a need to suggest options for supporting expensive subject areas of study;
  - In some cases there was a trend of higher take-up of expensive courses, which might be due to perceptions of better value for money, in terms of contact hours and provision etc. However, growth of numbers might have substantial implications for costs, eg limits to laboratory capacity;
  - Initial Teacher Training in Wales was less attractive than in England, where more incentives were available, and students could benefit from the tuition fee grant in addition.
- 1.4 UK issues:

- The financing of Wales' and England's institutions did not present a level playing field. Concerns were expressed regarding communication of this without sounding overly negative;
- There were concerns that the difference in funding between Wales and England was impacting on quality, and perceived and real quality were issues in attracting prospective students;
- It was not clear how long the current funding structure would be maintained in England, which could impact on decisions in Wales;
- There was little capital funding in Wales compared to England;
- A change in Westminster government was also likely to impact on the fee regime;
- The Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) charge was increasing. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report on poverty reduction in the UK, if the same trajectory continues, by 2020, 40% of the lowest paid graduates would never repay their loans. The committee agreed that a student loans based model was unsustainable and unstable.
- There was an increase in students leaving Wales to study in other parts of the UK.

#### 1.5 Graduates and graduate skills

- The idea of graduate jobs and graduate incomes was dissipating among prospective students, and there was a lower expectancy of fully repaying student loans
- The review could explore post-study graduate retention and its impact on the economy eg opportunities available;
- If higher level skills were required by the economy then these needed to be prioritised for funding if necessary, which could impact on size, funding and offers;
- The response should be clear about the impact of HE on skills and the economy, what HE needed to achieve, and whether the 3 year full time degree model met these needs;
- Potential prospective students have been undertaking apprenticeship schemes instead of entering HE due to student fees. This particularly affects widening access students. The WG proposal to cease funding apprenticeships might have a longer term impact on HE and on the economy, with its emphasis shifting towards 16-19 provision and an expectation for employers to pay more towards provision;
- It would be helpful for HEFCW to recognise that apprenticeships were the most appropriate approach for some students.

#### 1.6 Other issues

- It would be necessary to look at HEFCW's remit letter requirements in the changing HE context, eg the impact of removal of Welsh medium premium on Welsh provision, which had originally been planned to remain in addition to Coleg funding, as a consequence to changes in fees and funding.