

Meeting  
03/07/09

Agenda Item  
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Reference No  
HEFCW/09/47

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## **1 Issue**

- 1.1 This paper provides the outcome of a recent review which was commissioned by HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government to consider the future of the Welsh Video Network Support Centre in Welsh Further and Higher Education and Schools. It invites members to recommend future support for the network.

## **2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper**

- 2.1 The Welsh Video Network and Support Centre support HEFCW's aim under 'The deal for students' to increase the range and volume of Welsh medium provision. It also supports our technology-enhanced learning strategy (W08/12HE), which encourages institutions to use HEFCW-funded resources for collaboration, such as the Welsh Video Network.
- 2.2 Wales is one of the few administrations in the world with a distinctive statutory duty regarding sustainable development<sup>1</sup>. The Welsh Video Network and Support Centre enable the HE sector to reduce their environmental impact by reducing travel, thus helping to implement the sustainable development agenda.
- 2.3 Reconfiguration and collaboration are at the heart of the transformation agenda in Wales<sup>2</sup> and the higher education agenda to 2010<sup>3</sup>. The Welsh Video Network and Support Centre facilitate such collaboration, including with regards to Welsh Medium provision.

## **3 Recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. Note the annual report of the WVN for 2007/08;
  - ii. Recommend extension of HEFCW support for the WVNSC to 2012/13 with the potential of extending for a further two years, to 2014/15;

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<sup>1</sup> 'In Wales, sustainable development means enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations'

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/publications/090522susdevsdspage0115en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Skills that Work for Wales

<http://wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038232/403829/Consultations/1901302/skills-for-wales-cons-e.pdf?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> Reaching Higher

[http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/feandhe/reaching/?lang=en](http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/feandhe/reaching/?lang=en)

- iii. Approve HEFCW to go out to tender jointly with the Welsh Assembly Government for the WVN;
- iv. Agree that HEFCW should work with DCELLS to explore how the WVNSC may be brought under the PSBA as soon as practicable;
- v. Agree that HEFCW should work with DCELLS to explore how Swansea University might be enabled to manage the WVNSC in the interim period.

#### **4 Timing for decisions**

- 4.1 The decision is required now in order that HEFCW and the Welsh Assembly Government can tender jointly for the future operation of the Welsh Video Network.

#### **5 Council members' interests**

- 5.1 No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

#### **6 Further information**

- 6.1 Contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (Tel 029 2068 2283; E-mail: [cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk)).

## 7 Background

- 7.1 Studies commissioned by the higher and further education funding bodies in Wales (now DCELLS and HEFCW) provided evidence of the demand for an integrated national video network embracing Further and Higher Education. It was found that, while desktop videoconferencing was widely used in both FE and HE, only five HEIs had dedicated videoconferencing studios, which were the most suitable form of equipment to facilitate distance/collaborative learning and teaching.
- 7.2 The funding bodies funded a network of 80 videoconferencing studios across Wales, integrating HE and FE. They recognised the need to provide support to institutions with these studios. The WVN Support Centre (WVNSC) was therefore established, initially to provide technical support to users of the studios. More recently it has been asked to provide advice to other parties, such as Local Authorities and NHS Trusts. Staff working for the WVNSC are employed by Swansea University. The WVNSC is managed by JANet UK on behalf of the funding bodies.
- 7.3 A service (Rhwydiaith) to facilitate simultaneous interpretation of videoconferences was added in 2004. Support was extended in 2005 to provide teaching and learning advisors to encourage the pedagogically sound use of videoconferencing following a review of the Network<sup>4</sup>. WVNSC have struggled to recruit staff with teaching and learning expertise, which has hampered progress to encourage the use of videoconferencing to support learners effectively.
- 7.4 In 2006 the funding bodies jointly commissioned research to support a decision to upgrade equipment which was no longer capable of being maintained<sup>5</sup>. The funding bodies decided to continue to support the model of fully equipped studios. There are other lower cost, more flexible options for videoconferencing, but for group interaction, experience and research are clear that studios are the most appropriate option for Learning and Teaching.
- 7.5 By March 2010 DCELLS and HEFCW will have funded the refreshment of a reduced network of 32 studios in FE and 14 in HEIs. There will also be up to 11 studios in HEIs for which HEFCW will provide 50% match funding. In addition DCELLS support a network of 33 centrally funded studios in Welsh medium and bi-lingual secondary schools through the WVNSC and there is also a network of studios in schools, some of which purchase support from the WVNSC.
- 7.6 The activities of the WVNSC are monitored by a steering group which meets quarterly and includes representation from HEFCW, the Welsh Assembly Government, JANet UK, Swansea University and the Welsh Video Network.
- 7.7 The contract with JANet UK for managing the WVNSC will end in March 2010 and they no longer wish to continue with a management role.
- 7.8 The Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) Project provides public sector organisations in Wales with network services. The portfolio of data, voice and video services (including videoconferencing) is delivered across a range of connectivity services.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.wvn.ac.uk/WVS%20Final%20Report%20030605.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.wvn.ac.uk/WVN\\_Final\\_Report\\_070307.pdf](http://www.wvn.ac.uk/WVN_Final_Report_070307.pdf)

## **8 Annual report**

- 8.1 The annual report of the WVN for 2007/08 is available at **Annex A**. This provides information on the activities of the Welsh Video Network and statistics on use of video conferencing throughout the year.
- 8.2 HEIs use video conferencing for internal meetings, staff training, research and academic meetings. This has encouraged collaboration, enabled staff time to be used more effectively by reducing the time spent on travel, and helped the institutions to reduce their carbon footprints.

***Council is invited to note the annual report of the WVN for 2007/08***

## **9 The future of Welsh Video Network Support Centre**

- 9.1 HEFCW and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), within the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) commissioned a review from Old Bell<sup>3</sup> to:
- Assess the impact, strengths and weaknesses of the service currently provided by the WVNSC;
  - Recommend whether a service should continue to be provided; and
  - Recommend models for future provision of service, if appropriate.
- 9.2 A copy of the report is available at **Annex B**. The principal areas for recommendations are identified separately below.

### Funding of the Welsh Video Network

- 9.3 The report concluded that the WVNSC helped to maintain practitioners' confidence in the WVN's reliability, thus encouraging its extensive use. It had helped to standardise video conferencing solutions, which meant that the equipment was largely interoperable, and had also secured economies of scale in procurement of VC equipment.
- 9.4 It concluded that continuation of central funding of the WVNSC was the best way forward, with an initial commitment to three years' funding, with the potential of extending the service for a further two years. Procurement would need to start immediately in order to secure the WVNSC from the end of the current contracts.
- 9.5 Officers agree with this recommendation. It would protect the investment which HEFCW has made in the WVNSC and facilities to date. It would also deliver economies of scale, be administratively simple, and thus cheaper to run. Additionally, it would enable the WVNSC to explore the full range of VC technologies and advise on their use. This work would continue to be monitored via the WVN steering group, which includes HEFCW representation.
- 9.6 DCELLS has identified that it expects to continue to fund the WVNSC regardless of the decision HEFCW makes. If we decide not to fund the WVNSC separately, then institutions will have to make independent decisions about funding this work. The report cited concerns that without the WVNSC, institutions' use of video conferencing might dwindle, which would run counter to the spirit of emerging HEFCW and WAG policies with regards to environmental sustainability, collaboration, and technology-enhanced learning.

- 9.7 Given the expertise within HEIs with regards to learning and teaching, and support available from the Higher Education Academy, officers believe that the outcomes of the report do not warrant the continued funding of learning and teaching advisors through central funding beyond the period of the current contract.
- 9.8 Information on the likely costs of funding the WVNSC for 2009/10 is provided in section 10.

***Council is invited to recommend extension of HEFCW support for the WVNSC to 2012/13 with the potential of extending for a further two years, to 2014/15.***

***Council is invited to approve HEFCW to go out to tender jointly with the Welsh Assembly Government for the WVN.***

#### Management of the Welsh Video Network

- 9.9 The report recommended that the WVN be brought under the PSBA as soon as possible. This fits with the agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government, and would provide an option of expanding the WVNSC to extend its benefits to the public sector more broadly and encourage cross-sector collaboration. This has the potential to deliver longer term cost savings.
- 9.10 Integration of the WVNSC with the PSBA would include consideration of how the relationship between the WVNSC and the JANet UK family of services will be maintained. JANET has a direct relationship with the PSBA, which connects to the JANET backbone, which would facilitate consideration of this relationship.
- 9.11 The WVNSC would need to be managed in the interim. The consultants explored a variety of options, and concluded that the most logical way forward would be for Swansea University to take over the management of the service until such time as the WVNSC could be integrated into the PSBA. This would provide the least disruption in arrangements in terms of staffing, relocation, establishing client relationships, prior to the establishment of a long term solution via the integration of the WVNSC into the PSBA.
- 9.12 The Welsh Assembly Government is investigating the tendering requirements for placing WVNSC into PSBA to determine whether or not a European procurement exercise will be required.

***Council is invited to agree that HEFCW should work with DCELLS to explore how the WVNSC may be brought under the PSBA as soon as practicable.***

***Council is invited to agree that HEFCW should work with DCELLS to explore how Swansea University might be enabled to manage the WVNSC in the interim period.***

## **10 Financial implications**

- 10.1 At the May 2007 Council meeting Members approved the ongoing costs of around £130,000 per annum (plus inflation) for three years from 2008/09 (item HEFCW/07/Min116 refers). The cost for 2008/09 was lower than anticipated, at approximately £75k.

10.2 The cost of funding the WVNSC core services for 2009/10 is projected to be as follows:

Management fee	£7k
WVN Support Centre FEI/HEI 'core service'	£132k
Learning and Teaching Support Advisers for HEIs and FEIs	£73k
Rhwydiaith (simultaneous interpretation service operations and maintenance)	£89k
<b>Total</b>	<b>£301k</b>

10.3 These costs are split between DCELLS and HEFCW pro rata to the number of funded studios, ie 57:23. This would make HEFCW's contribution approximately £87k.

10.4 The refit of the current network included maintenance costs for three years, so during the lifetime of the funding schedule proposed (three years with the possibility of extending for a further two years), maintenance costs will also need to be factored in. We know from discussions with JANet UK that the management costs are too low in terms of the time involved in management of this contract. It is therefore almost certain that this element of the cost will increase. However, officers estimate that over the five years of the new contract, the ongoing costs should not exceed the previously approved costs of around £130,000 per annum. This means that there would be no increase in comparison to the current budget.

10.5 A further paper will be brought to Council when the contract is awarded and will outline the precise costs involved.

## **11 Communications implications**

11.1 DCELLS are the major partners in this work. We expect to work collaboratively with them to communicate and disseminate the outcomes of this work.

## **12 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications**

12.1 The WVNSC provides benefits for both diversity and equal opportunities in supporting video conferencing.

- Video conferencing can be used to help people with disabilities in distant locations to communicate, including using sign language;
- It avoids the need for people, whatever their circumstances, to make long or difficult journeys to meetings which they otherwise might be unable to attend;
- The translation facilities enable Welsh medium meetings and teaching, thus supporting bilingual communication teaching;
- The proposals do not disadvantage particular groups on the basis of age, disability, gender, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or preferred language;
- The Welsh medium and translation facilities support aspects of our Welsh Language Scheme.

### 13 Risk Assessment

13.1 The identified risks arising from the issues covered by this paper are identified in the table below:

13.2

RISK	ACTION TO ADDRESS RISK
DCELLS wish to continue funding the service. If HEFCW does not collaborate on the procurement of the service, collaborative benefits would be reduced. This would reduce the potential for collaborating with other parts of the education sector in Wales, and with other parts of the public sector if the handover to the PSBA is made.	Continue to fund the WVNSC centrally.
With an ineffective video network, collaboration between institutions would be more difficult.	Continue to fund the WVNSC centrally
WVN staff leave due to uncertainty of employment	Inform staff as soon as possible regarding decisions made about the funding of the WVNSC.
Poor use of HEFCW resources	Continue to monitor the activities of the WVNSC via quarterly meetings of the WVN steering group. Integrate with the PSBA to enable greater roll-out of the WVN and to deliver greater cost savings; collaborate with DCELLS to maximise use of resources
Unable to find a manager for the contract in the interim period	We will work with DCELLS to address this. JANet have agreed to help with the handover. DCELLS are in discussion with the PSBA to identify logistics of any handover and we could work with them to bring forward the timescales of the handover if necessary. In the short term we could ask JANet to continue to undertake these responsibilities while we seek a new manager, should Swansea University be unable or unwilling to undertake this role and should the PSBA be unable to bring timescales for a handover forward sufficiently.
Poor handover of the WVNSC to the PSBA	JANet are involved with the PSBA and have indicated their willingness to continue this involvement. DCELLS and HEFCW officers will work with them and the PSBA to make the transition as smooth as possible.

<p>New service proves very costly.</p>	<p>HEFCW proposes not funding the learning and teaching advisor posts for HE. Officers have identified that even with an increase in costs for maintenance contracts and for management fees, the cost should not exceed the current budget. Additionally, there are potential long term savings to be made by movement of the service into the PSBA.</p>
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