

**For Our Future:
Note of Joint Meeting of HEFCW's Committees**

held on 12 March 2010 at the New House Hotel, Cardiff

Purpose of Meeting

- 1 A joint meeting of members of the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee, Research, the Innovation and Engagement Committee and the Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee was held on 12 March 2010. Its purpose was to consider and advise on HEFCW's draft Corporate Strategy, which had been developed in response to *For Our Future*. The meeting was chaired by Dame Alexander Burslem. A list of those who attended is attached at **Appendix A**, and a copy of the programme is attached at **Appendix B**.

Introduction and Context

- 2 David Blaney, Director of Strategic Development, gave an introductory presentation on context, key issues and HEFCW's actions to date. He emphasised that the Minister is looking for significant change and wants to see results quickly.
- 3 HEFCW has taken the following actions to date:
 - submitted an initial Action Plan to WAG for responding to *For Our Future*. However, the Minister does not consider it sufficiently radical. HEFCW is required to submit a full Action Plan in May.
 - drawn up a new Corporate Strategy in response to *For Our Future*, which is currently out for consultation.
 - issued a consultation paper on the regional dimensions of *For Our Future*, with responses due by the end of May.
- 4 The key issues to be determined are:
 - What is the "big picture" for the future?
 - How prescriptive should HEFCW be? Should it draw up a blueprint for the shape of the sector?
 - What indicators or targets should be used in the Corporate Strategy? How many should there be? The selected indicators must be SMART and must measure impact not inputs.

- 5 David Blaney emphasised that HEFCW needs as much input as possible from the sector in responding to the challenges of *For Our Future*. He thanked Committee members and Chairs for giving their time to participate in the joint meeting.

Committee Perspectives

- 6 The Chairs of the three Committees outlined their Committees' current perspectives on *For Our Future*.

Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee (Dame Alexandra Burslem)

- 7 Sandra Burslem reported that the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee had to date taken a responsive approach to considering bids for collaboration funding. Several of those collaborations approved to date by the Committee had been for initiation of strategic research developments, delivering a step change in capacity in support of the knowledge economy agenda. The support for such developments had been time-limited, with other funding sources ensuring the long-term sustainability.
- 8 Against the context of a tightening of the funding situation, it was reported that the Committee was now to take a more proactive role in seeking collaboration in support of *For Our Future*. In taking this type of approach, the question was posed as to whether a blueprint should be developed for the sector and whether stakeholders might assist in this.
- 9 The issue of contestability was raised, with criteria needed to underpin future judgements on proposals.

Research Innovation and Engagement Committee (Professor Robin Williams)

- 10 Robin Williams reported that the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee had had an initial discussion of *For Our Future* at its meeting on 20 January 2010. The main issues from its perspective are:
 - *For Our Future* is quite an inward-looking document, focusing on Wales. It is important that the Action Plan should place more emphasis on the international aspects of higher education. Research is an international activity, and it must not be constrained by the regional agenda. It would, however, be appropriate for third mission activities to be undertaken on a regional basis, and there are already some good examples of regional partnerships.
 - In implementing *For Our Future*, there is a danger of missing the big picture. The focus should be kept firmly on drawing on higher education to deliver a prosperous country.

- There is a need to improve research grant capture in Wales. Current levels of performance are, however, due in part to a deficit in numbers of STEM researchers in Wales, and this is an issue which also requires attention.
- There are also concerns about lack of critical mass in many research groups. The inter-institutional research collaborations supported from HEFCW's Research and Collaboration Fund are helping to address this in some areas. However, it is also important for research groups in Welsh HEIs to collaborate with institutions outside Wales.
- The Research Councils and Technology Strategy Board are UK-wide organisations, but they do not always seem to take full account of the implications of devolution. There is a tendency for them to develop funding schemes which align with priorities in England, without taking account of priorities in Wales. It is important for Wales to improve high-level political engagement with these organisations.
- It is important to remember that all aspects of the higher education system are interlinked, and that changes to one area can have unintended consequences elsewhere in the system.

Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee (Professor Leni Oglesby)

- 11 SETQC specifically considered *For our Future* and its implications for the student experience, skills and widening access, in particular:
- In reviewing the funding allocation for part-time students, there needed to be greater consideration of the experience of part-time students, an improvement in the part-time student voice, and recognition of the diversity of part-time students. New part-time student fee plans should be evidence based, not policy based. It was recognised that it would be a challenge to embed and prioritise part-time provision.
 - The definition and purpose of widening access needs to be redefined given the economic climate. There needs to be a greater focus on student completion, and enabling students to keep open the avenues to access.
 - The skills agenda should be developed with a focus on existing partnerships, in the first instance, to learn of employers needs. There needs to be greater institutional collaboration and coordination to deliver workforce development as set out in *For our Future*.
 - SETQC advised that indicators that measure impact and success should support work being carried out.
 - The Committee recommended that any regional approach should focus on good practice and existing partnerships but did not rule out new partnerships. The rationale for the regional approach needed to be made clear. If the regional approach encouraged more effective use of resources, then there needed to be collaboration and planning to develop subject disciplines and communities.

Group Discussion

12 Participants were divided into three groups, each chaired by one of the Committee Chairs. The groups were all asked to address the same three questions, but each group focused primarily on a different question. The questions were:

- What should the sector look like in 5-10 years time in response to *For Our Future?*
- Are there any additional actions which should be included in HEFCW's Corporate Strategy in response to *For Our Future?*
- Are the measures and indicators in the Corporate Strategy the correct ones? Are there any gaps?

At the end of the session, each group reported back on its discussions.

The main points discussed in the groups are summarised at **Appendix C**.

For Our Future

**Joint Meeting of HEFCW Committees
Friday, 12 March 2010**

Attendance

David Blaney, HEFCW
Professor Peter Blood, Cardiff University (RIE Committee)
Ewen Brierley, HEFCW
Dame Alexander Burslem, Chair of Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee
Roger Carter, HEFCW
Elizabeth Clark, HEW
Teresa Cooper, HEFCW
Jackie Creswell-Griffith, HEFCW
Katie Dalton, NUSW
Professor Richard Davies, Swansea University (RIE Committee)
Dr Julian Ellis, QAA (SETQ Committee)
Phil Gummatt, HEFCW
Professor Ian Halliday, Reconfiguration and Collaboration Committee
Professor Brian Hobbs, University of Glamorgan (RIE Committee)
Celia Hunt, HEFCW
Geraint Jones, Cardiff University (RIE Committee)
Sarah Lewis, ESTYN
Professor Mari Lloyd-Williams, Council member
Gemma Long, HEFCW
Ioan Matthews, Centre for Welsh Medium Education (SETQ Committee)
Lisa Newberry, HEW
Professor Leni Oglesby, Chair of SETQ Committee
Professor Danny Saunders, University of Glamorgan (SETQ Committee)
John Selby, HEFCE, (R&C Committee)
Professor Sir Brian Smith, Council member
Alyson Thomas, HEFCW
Dennis Thomas, Aberystwyth University
Gavin Thomas
Roger Thomas, Chair of HEFCW Council
Linda Tiller, HEFCW
Jayne Williams, Open University in Wales (SETQ Committee)
Professor Robin Williams, Chair of Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee

For Our Future
Joint Meeting of HEFCW Committees

Friday, 12 March 2010
New House Hotel, Cardiff
(Wyndham Room)

PROGRAMME

2.15 pm	Arrival and coffee
2.30 pm	<i>For Our Future</i> and HEFCW's Corporate Strategy (David Blaney, Director of Strategic Development)
2.45 pm	The Committees' perspectives (Dame Alexandra Burslem, Professor Leni Oglesby, Professor Robin Williams)
3.00 pm	Discussion of Key Questions (three groups, mixed between committees)
4.00 pm	Feedback from groups
4.30 pm	Close and departure

Summary of Group Discussions

Group A Discussion Outcomes

Question 1: What should the sector look like in 5-10 years time in response to *For Our Future*

- No more than 4 or 5 universities with an appropriate mix of pre and post 1992 (or research and non-research intensive);
- These 4-5 HEIs will operate in both national and global arenas with their diversified missions reflected in a diversified fee regime;
- There will be significant employer engagement in both the teaching and research agenda of HEIs;
- The reduced number of HEIs will be supported by enhanced levels of HE delivery by a similarly reconfigured Welsh FE sector populated by regionally focused “super-FEIs”;
- At a regional level, HEIs will work strategically alongside FEIs to rationalise provision across both sectors in response to the particular learning and delivery needs of stakeholders in that region of Wales;
- Part-time/flexible delivery will constitute a major area of focus in all regional agendas;
- Within the HE sector there will be increased levels of competitive (contestable) funding – which by the end of 10 years may well have reversed the current 20/80% funding split (ie between non-contestable and contestable);
- Will have achieved enhanced levels of public engagement and understanding of the contribution that Wales’ HEIs make to both social and economic well-being;
- Expenditure on HE will universally be regarded as an investment and not a drain on the public purse;
- Specifically in relation to Welsh-medium issues, care must be taken not to build Coleg Ffederal too rigidly on the sector as it is now but to make it flexible enough to grow into the sector as it will be in 5-10 years time.

Question 2: Are there any additional actions which should be included in HEFCW’s Corporate Strategy in response to *For Our Future*?

- HEFCW’s role should be to ensure that HE policy in Wales is evidenced based and not driven by political dogma;
- Promotion of STEM should be given more priority within HEFCW’s Corporate Plan (CP), with the Council to take on a more proactive role in building STEM capacity in Wales;

- HEFCW should be more judicious in its use of the term *partnership* within its CP and avoid promoting partnerships merely as devices for securing additional levels of funding (ie emphasis should be on promoting sustainable partnerships that will make longterm differences to Welsh HE and Wales in general, not just provide a means to funding for the 'partners' involved).
- HEFCW should prioritise investment in areas of institutional strength but the identification of these areas for investment should not be driven by HEFCW alone – ie. it should be for V-Cs and not HEFCW to decide where an axe must fall;
- One appropriate way for HEFCW to help HEIs prioritise would be by increasing the funding differential between STEM subjects and arts and humanities subjects;
- A CP should span more than 3 years;

Group B

Question 2: Are there any additional actions which should be included in HEFCW's Corporate Strategy in response to For Our Future?

- Additional actions should be included in relation to the contribution HE can make to Health and Wellbeing as this would not only benefit individuals, but also underpin spin-out and commercial opportunities;
- The Civic and Cultural role of HEIs should be included, with actions in relation to what HEIs can do for their localities. The contribution of HEIs to green issues was highlighted as an area of importance to students;
- Publicising the achievements of HEIs, through working jointly with HEW on PR documents; and
- The strategy might include actions in relation to 'quick wins' such as health developments currently in the pipeline, the Coleg Ffederal and the impact of research centres on economic renewal (e.g. the Low Carbon Research Institute's impact through links with architects, planners etc). This might also include work with the Sector Skills Councils (e.g. Skillset, ESkills, Cogent, Creative and Cultural etc) to develop 2-3 areas where pilots might be established to improve the volume and character of graduate/ postgraduate skills. As research skills are important in terms of the development of the sector and the knowledge economy, the research training delivered by Cardiff might be opened up across Wales.

Question 1: What should the sector look like in 5-10 years time in response to For Our Future?

- The sector might have a two or three tier structure including a few research-intensive HEIs, at least one of which is in the top 20 in the UK and 100 internationally, as well as teaching-led institutions interacting within a local-regional dimension. The structure of the sector might take the form of regional clusters around the research intensive HEIs;
- The structure should not preclude collaboration on a pan-Wales basis;

- The regional agenda should result in better organised teaching and access to business, with some research potentially also being organised on a regional basis. However, most research would be best organised on a pan-Wales basis;
- Research should not be divorced from teaching, with STEM needing to be viewed on a Wales-wide basis in order to ensure a presence in each region;
- The regions would be South-East, South-West and Mid & North Wales, with institutions agreeing 'not to compete', with a division of labour and rationalisation of subjects between the HEIs within a region in a 'Jigsaw' model, removing dispersed provision. The acceptability of such regional structures would need to be tested with stakeholders including students and research councils; and
- Research centres would play a critical role in economic development and renewal, including high-level skills development. This would require HEFCW to be more fully involved in DE&T discussions regarding economic renewal.

Question 3: Are the measures and indicators in the Corporate Strategy the correct ones? Are there any gaps?

- Indicators would need to be under the control of the HE sector;
- The potential for unintended consequences, such as indicators driving HEI behaviour, should be avoided; and
- A debate should be held with HEIs regarding potential indicators.

Group C

Question 3: Are the measures and indicators in the Corporate Strategy the correct ones? Are there any gaps?

- There was general agreement that there are too many indicators in the draft Corporate Strategy. It was suggested that it would be better to identify five main areas, and have two indicators for each area. These areas could be: access; research; reshaping the sector; knowledge exchange; and student experience/skills.
- Indicators must be chosen carefully, as they do not just measure change but actually drive behaviour – for example, in the way that institutions handle module completions. Additionally, it is important to ensure that indicators do not work against one another. For example, there are tensions between indicators relating to widening access and module completion.

Question 1: What should the sector look like in 5-10 years time in response to For Our Future?

- As a starting point, Roger Carter commented that the Welsh Assembly Government states that it spends more on higher education than any other

part of the UK. It could be argued that, given its population size, Wales should only have five to six higher education institutions. These would have the critical mass to deliver good quality higher education.

- Given the scale of groupings emerging elsewhere, there are real concerns about whether small HEIs will be viable in future and capable of attracting high quality staff and researchers. If they are not, good students will go elsewhere.
- It was noted that, if there were a move to five or six HEIs in Wales, it would be important to establish a clear network with the FE sector.
- The group did not dissent from the model of five to six HEIs in Wales. It was noted, however, that there are also other approaches to securing critical mass such as:
 - the umbrella model operated by the University of Glamorgan. Under this approach, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and Merthyr College are part of the wider Glamorgan group, but have also retained their own brand identity.
 - The research pooling model operated in Scotland for entire subject areas such as Physics and Chemistry.
- It was agreed that there is considerable scope for groups of neighbouring institutions to share use of expensive infrastructure resources such as libraries and laboratories. Such arrangements could be the first step to deeper forms of integration.

Question 2: Are there any additional actions which should be included in HEFCW's Corporate Strategy in response to For Our Future?

- The Corporate Strategy should place more emphasis on the international dimension. It is recognised that the regional agenda is important for HE, but at the same time it is essential that the sector maintains its international standing.
- A recent trip by representatives of Welsh HEIs to India has demonstrated that there is real interest in India in collaborating with whole groups or networks of HEIs from elsewhere in the world. One of the potential benefits of reducing the number of HEIs in Wales to five or six would be that this grouping could be readily badged and networked internationally.
- The group discussed the question of a clear top-level concept for HE in Wales. There was some support for the development by HEFCW of a sector blueprint.