

**To: Heads of higher education
institutions in Wales**

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Response By: No response required

Further Information: Alison Allan

**WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RESPONSES TO THE
CONSULTATION**

As you will recall, we conducted a consultation last year on behalf of the Steering Group for Welsh Medium Provision in Higher Education on the draft strategy which the Group had prepared (W04/50HE). Following the consultation, the Strategy was considered by the Council and forwarded to the Minister, together with a summary of the consultation responses. I enclose a copy of the summary and the covering letter to the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Steering Group considered the responses at its recent meeting in January. Discussions are continuing in the Steering Group on the further development and implementation of the strategy and with Assembly Government officials.

Yours sincerely

PHILIP GUMMETT

WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION STRATEGY: CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Responses were received from:

University of Glamorgan
University of Wales, Aberystwyth
University of Wales, Bangor
School of Welsh Medium Studies, University of Wales, Bangor
University of Wales Swansea
University of Wales, Newport
Trinity College, Carmarthen
Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC – National Union of Teachers of Wales)

- 1 The production of the strategy was welcomed and on the whole endorsed as a clear, pragmatic document which identified the main issues and proposed sensible and realistic ways of addressing these. It was also considered a significant contribution to the debate on the development of Welsh medium provision in the sector. Some responses congratulated the Steering Group on its work.
- 2 Most respondents agreed with the key principles set out in the strategy. There was a recognition of the importance of collaboration and some respondents specifically noted the responsibility of their institutions in being willing to engage in such collaboration. The need for workable models of collaboration which could be supported by the sector as a whole and individual institutions was emphasised. There was support for central co-ordination and activity as provided by the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit. Institutions' responses also indicated how they themselves were seeking to develop increasingly strategic approaches to the development of Welsh medium provision in their institutions.
- 3 The creation of a sustainable system for Welsh medium provision both in terms of infrastructure and funding mechanisms/levels over the long-term also featured strongly in responses. In this context, the review of the costs of Welsh medium provision and possible implications for the level of the Welsh medium premium which the Steering Group recommends that the Council should undertake was welcomed. Overall, responses emphasised the need for significant additional investment in Welsh medium provision (including through the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund). The identification of potential requirements within the strategy for additional resources was supported. One response stressed particularly that, if Welsh medium education was to exist within an overall HE funding system based on supply and demand, then the financial implications of this had to be recognised – provision could not be developed on the basis of goodwill alone.
- 4 The point about investment in Welsh medium provision was made not just in the context of expansion, but also because of the fragility of existing provision. There was seen to be a need for urgency in securing the necessary funding to enable the strategy to be implemented.

- 5 One institutional response noted the frustration and disappointment felt by students and its staff (who often put in considerable personal effort to maintain and extend Welsh medium provision) when earlier proposals had not been able to be implemented because of a lack of funding. This frustration was evident in the response submitted by some of the staff at the institution following a discussion of the strategy. They felt that Welsh medium provision was in a very difficult position given the generally tight financial resources in institutions and an economic model which emphasised that provision had to be cost-effective. There were concerns about issues which made it difficult to recruit Welsh medium staff. They considered that the present funding systems made intra and inter-institutional collaboration difficult. They also felt strongly that there needed to be direct additional investment to secure and strengthen provision in individual institutions as well as a longer-term funding system which would provide a sustainable base for Welsh medium provision and staffing.
- 6 The response from UCAC was largely set within the context of its view that a "Federal College" should be established for Welsh medium provision.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RECRUITMENT

- 7 The proposals in the strategy on staff development and recruitment were generally supported. The Postgraduate and Teaching Fellowship Schemes were seen as a crucial element in increasing the potential supply of Welsh medium academics, particularly in institutions where research was a major aspect of their mission. However, respondents also emphasised the need for a parallel stream of funding (as proposed in the strategy) for vocational disciplines where the route to a higher education career might be through occupational competency rather than a research degree or provide opportunities for strengthening Welsh medium teaching capacity in institutions which might not have sufficient Welsh-speaking staff to consider taking on a student under the Postgraduate Scheme.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROVISION

- 8 The discussion in the strategy on the development and expansion of Welsh medium provision was generally well-received. As noted above, replies were supportive of taking a collaborative approach, as well as planning developments on a subject-by-subject basis. It was suggested that the strategy needed to be developed further in areas such as identifying priorities in curriculum development in subjects which had most relevance to the skills required in Wales, exploiting the potential of ICT, and part-time and lifelong learning opportunities. Responses also reflected to some extent the perspective of the individual institution: thus, where there was limited provision at present, greater pump-priming funding was seen to be needed than in those institutions with relatively more Welsh medium provision; or alternatively, in institutions where provision was more extensive, it was suggested that increasing provision in institutions across the sector should not weaken existing concentrations of provision.

MARKETING AND PROGRESSION

- 9 Responses welcomed the central support for marketing and market research to understand and stimulate demand, although one respondent felt that the key role for marketing Welsh medium provision lay with individual institutions.

Student demand

- 10 One institution identified what it considered were important, although difficult issues, in terms of the financial and other factors which influenced student choices on Welsh or English medium study.
- Institutions could not depend on a defined group of students who wanted to study solely through the medium of Welsh for expanding the number of Welsh medium students. The system needed to be geared better to the wider group of students who could be encouraged, if the circumstances were right, to include some Welsh medium study within their courses.
 - Welsh medium provision was competing for students within a UK market for HE in which value for money considerations were becoming increasingly relevant for students and their parents.
 - It was not always possible to identify unequivocally the positive advantages for particular careers of Welsh medium study.
 - Students on Welsh medium courses could feel at a disadvantage because of the lack of Welsh medium study resources and materials compared with English medium courses. This had always been an issue but was now exacerbated by the volume of material available in English through the internet and other electronic means.
- 11 The same institution suggested that, as part of its review of financial support arrangements for students, the Welsh Assembly Government might consider whether there should be some financial incentive for students, such as bursaries to set against the proportion of their fees which related to their Welsh medium modules.

29 October 2004

John Howells
Head of Higher Education Division
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION STRATEGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I write to submit a copy of the strategy for Welsh medium provision, as considered by HEFCW at its meeting on 21 October.

As you know, the Minister welcomed the establishment by the Council of a Steering Group to develop a strategy for Welsh medium provision in higher education and has emphasised on a number of occasions that she looks forward to receiving the strategy. We wrote to Derek Adams in May, enclosing a summary of the emerging principles and conclusions of the Steering Group for the Minister's information, and confirmed that, following a period of consultation over the summer and consideration by the Council, we would submit the strategy to the Minister formally in the autumn.

The Council is very appreciative of the work and commitment of the members of the Steering Group, under the leadership of Andrew Green as chair. It welcomed the opportunity taken by the Minister to discuss the work of the Group with Andrew earlier this year.

The strategy and the responses to the consultation were considered by the Council on 21 October. The consultation responses were broadly supportive of the strategy and made some helpful suggestions. The consultation responses will inform further development and implementation of the strategy but it is not considered that they affect its substance. We enclose a summary of the responses so that the Minister may take account of the views expressed. The responses will be considered in detail by the Steering Group at its next meeting early next year. While the Steering Group recognised that the timing of the consultation over the summer was not ideal, and possibly as a result responses were not numerous, the Group was mindful of the Minister's wish to see the strategy as soon as possible. As the strategy is implemented, there will be continuing engagement and discussion with the sector.

It is worth noting that the responses reflect the very real challenge in encouraging and/or enabling more students to undertake at least an element of their higher education courses through the medium of Welsh. As well as the points made in the responses, demand is also

significantly determined by the choices which students make about their language of study at earlier stages in their education. The work which ELWa is doing to strengthen Welsh medium provision in the post-16 sector is vital here and the Council will work closely with colleagues in ELWa, as well as taking advantage of the expertise from the post-16 and schools sector on the Steering Group.

The strategy has noted that its implementation will have significant funding implications beyond the resources which HEFCW currently has available for Welsh medium provision and will require additional investment from the Welsh Assembly Government. The Council recognises that in the immediate future this will include encouraging and working with the sector to enable appropriate proposals to be made to the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund. The Postgraduate Scholarship and Teaching Fellowship Schemes which have recently been submitted to you for approval are an example of this. The consultation responses emphasise the centrality of these schemes to increasing Welsh medium staffing capacity in the sector. Work is also continuing on the development of an options appraisal of potential models for delivering Welsh medium provision.

Some limited early work on certain aspects of the strategy, such as marketing and staff development, and collaborative development through the subject panels of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit, can take place within the present budgets for Welsh medium provision of the Council and the Unit. Additional resources as outlined in the strategy would enable more comprehensive progress to be made.

However, as the strategy emphasises, if expansion is to be achieved and maintained, then the longer-term aim must be the establishment of a sustainable framework and funding system for Welsh medium provision and the resource implications of this will need to be considered following completion of the options appraisal.

I enclose the strategy, together with the summary of the consultation responses, for presentation to the Minister. We look forward to the Minister's response and continuing discussions with Assembly officers in working towards the achievement of the *Reaching Higher* target.

Yours sincerely

PHILIP GUMMETT

