

15 October 2004

Mr Grenville Jackson
Director of Strategy & Skills
ELWa
St David's House
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Dear

RE: ELWA INTERIM REPORT & CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – *DEVELOPING THE WORKFORCE: LEARNING IN AND FOR THE WORKPLACE*

I am writing with HEFCW's response to the above consultation exercise.

Following your presentation to the Council's Third Committee, which I understand was very well received, I am sure that our comments will hold no surprises for you. I hope, too, that you found the discussion of this document by the Committee stimulating and informative.

We do not intend to respond to each of the 51 individual consultation points. Instead we will confine our response to a general observation, supported by a more detailed list of issues that we feel could have been addressed more fully in the course of the review.

Our main point of concern is the impression given by the current report that the HE sector in Wales has very little to contribute to work based learning. This is not the case and HEFCW has been providing funding to higher education institutions (HEIs) in Wales since the early 1990s to support the delivery of training and consultancy services to business. In 2002/03 for example, Welsh HEIs delivered in excess of £20 million worth of training and consultancy to businesses.

You are aware, I know, that the HE sector's role in promoting skills and employability was strongly signalled in the Assembly Government's strategy for higher education in Wales, *Reaching Higher*, and it has been reinforced in successive remit letters. More recently, *Skills and Employability* has been highlighted as one of the three key strategic areas in which the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning and Minister for Economic Development and Transport have specifically requested HEFCW, ELWa and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) to work more closely together. We were, therefore, disappointed that HEFCW was not invited to join the project steering group. Had we been represented we could have drawn attention to the contribution that HEIs are already making in this area. For example, on page 47, the report makes a number of recommendations about developing work based learning provision through the medium of Welsh - an area in which several of our HEIs have cultivated niche markets and developed considerable expertise.

The following list details a number of other areas in which we suggest that it would have been useful to consider the HE dimensions:

- Potential role of HEFCW (and its funded institutions) in responding to outcomes of the latest FSW survey;
- Role of HEFCW in ascertaining and meeting employers' higher level skills needs;
- Progression routes from post-16 to HE level qualifications;
- What role the UK's National Occupational Standards might play in future training curriculum developments in both the post-16 and HE sectors in Wales to meet employer needs at local, regional and national levels.
- FE/HE links in Wales (including addressing whether or not competition between FEIs and HEIs in delivery of work based training helps either of our organisations);
- Identification of appropriate fora at national and regional level in which to engage HEFCW (and HEIs) in order to enhance HE sector's understanding of business needs and employers' understanding of HE services and products, eg at the pan-Wales level, Sector Skills Wales Network meetings;
- Improving HE sector links with the *Business Eye* initiative;
- Recognition of role for the HE sector in the development of sectoral approaches;
- Consideration of the role of Wales' Business Schools in taking forward the management development agenda in Wales (HEFCW already working with the Wales Management Council and Welsh business schools in this area);
- Existing high levels of provision already being delivered to business by Welsh HEIs– eg bespoke training and CPD packages offered in a variety of ways (on campus, in the work place, in the community, via electronic or distance learning, accredited and non-accredited);
- Existing HE expertise in Welsh medium training, CPD etc;
- HEFCW responsibility for funding initial teacher training in Wales (including training of Welsh-medium teachers); and

Many of the issues in the above list were also raised by HEFCW in its response to the recent consultation on a revised Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales (SEAP2). We note that the outcomes of ELWa's review are intended to inform the finalisation of SEAP2. It is unfortunate that much of the debate in this area frequently overlooks the significant contribution of HE and the sector is too often perceived as peripheral to the skills agenda in Wales (eg as evidenced by the lack of reference to HE by the employers contacted in the course of the current ELWa study). If Wales is to meet the targets for economic development set out in such Assembly strategies as *A Winning Wales*, it will be imperative that the HE sector plays its part in full. For this reason we very much regret the lack of regard to HE in this review and hope that this will not be carried forward into the finalised SEAP2.

Phil Gummett

Cc Richard Keveren