

21 January 2005

Mr Grenville Jackson
Director of Strategy & Skills
ELWa
St David's House
Newtown
Powys
SY16 1RB

Dear

Workplace Learning Review

Thank you for your letter of 7 January regarding our contribution to ELWa's Workplace Learning Review. We have also now had a chance to look at the final outcomes of the review as Teresa Holdsworth provided us with a copy of the report when she attended the last meeting of our Third Mission Committee on your behalf on 11 January.

Naturally, we very much welcome the emphasis on partnership working in the recommendations that have been accepted by the Assembly Government. However, we must counsel caution regarding the references to "*exploiting the potential of Foundation Degrees as an outward progression point at 19+.*" As we stated in our response to the Assembly's consultation on SEAP2, whilst foundation degrees have many attractions, any further development of them in Wales would have to be conducted with care. This is partly because questions have been raised about some of them by the Quality Assurance Agency. Concerns have also been raised, including by employers, about the possibility that in some cases, foundation degrees are simply replacing HNDs/HNCs as opposed to opening up new opportunities for learners.

Furthermore, unlike in England, foundation degrees do not currently constitute a policy priority in Wales (although some Welsh HEIs are currently offering them without funding support from the Council). If HEFCW was to begin funding foundation degrees at a rate pro rata to England we would require a significant uplift in funding from the Assembly Government to cover both developmental activity and an addition in funded student numbers of some 600 FTEs. Our latest draft remit letter from the Assembly Government makes no reference to foundation degrees nor to resources to support their introduction.

The above said, there is already considerable provision within Wales that facilitates access and entrance onto HE level courses based upon age and experience. I am sure there is scope here for our two organisations to work more closely together to ensure that these routes are more widely publicised to learners across Wales. There is also a possible role here for the emerging SSCs in Wales with which HEFCW is keen to increase its engagement

in order to help improve mutual understanding of both what the Welsh HE sector has to offer, and needs to contribute, to employers and learners alike.

I will suggest to the Chair of our Third Mission Committee that this letter is circulated to members as a basis for a discussion in this area at the Committee's next meeting on 14 April 2005.

Phil Gummett