Note of Welsh Studies Event

Introduction

1.	Professor Leni Oglesby (member of HEFCW's Council and Chair of SETQC) introduced the event drawing upon the similarities between Welsh Studies and the process that the Welsh Government had undertaken with regards to schools in its consultation on the Cwricwlwm Cymreig.

Keynote speaker

2.	A keynote presentation was delivered by Professor Merfyn Jones, detailing the concept and development of Welsh Studies from the perspective of an academic whose research specialism could be included in the Welsh Studies concept. Professor Jones identified three points for the attendees to be aware of:

- The concept of Welsh Studies was not new. There had been a long tradition of academic research especially in Welsh History but there had been little emphasis on learning and teaching. Devolution has begun to change this with an increase in demand for courses and modules focusing on elements of Welsh Studies and more subject areas such as Anthropology, Geography, Law and Politics providing a Welsh Studies element;

- There were some networks or provision and provision in Welsh Studies which provided an opportunity for this to be truly disciplined or multi-disciplined. The challenge was how to bring subjects together within this field, especially given that the system of funding within universities did not help interdisciplinary studies;

- Welsh Studies did not need to be parochial or inward looking, and does not clash with international agendas. Welsh Studies provided an opportunity to place Wales in the context of the wider world.

HEFCW's role

3.	The role of HEFCW in developing Welsh Studies and the purpose of the event was explained by Celia Hunt (Director of Skills Education and Funding). It was suggested that the sector itself should be responsible for taking Welsh Studies forwards, as it was not appropriate for HEFCW to intervene in curriculum areas.

4.	HEFCW had arranged the event to ensure that a collective understanding of what Welsh Studies was could be achieved and that a future survey could be conducted, if appropriate, that would provide robust results that could be published. It was suggested that the Higher Education Academy (HEA) could provide support to the sector to develop Welsh Studies further. It was also noted that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was overseeing the review of the subject benchmark for Welsh, which included Welsh Studies.

<u>Data collection</u>

5. Hannah Falvey (Head of Statistics) provided a summary of the data collection exercise that took place in December 2012. The returns confirmed that at present there are 2183 modules that are recognised as having a Welsh Studies component within Welsh HEIs and 297 modules within HE provision in Welsh FEIs. This is 7.5% of the overall provision provided within the HEI sector.[1]

6. A number of different caveats have impacted on the robustness of the data. The original circular asked for overall numbers, however in the returns some institutions differentiated between UG and PG study where as others did not and therefore the returns were an amalgamation of both UG and PG. The survey also asked that institutions "*indicate for each of the modules listed ….the proportion of the module which you would consider is to be taken up by Welsh Studies*". It is therefore important to note that the proportions are based on institutional judgements.

7. The percentage of 'Welsh Studies' provision within each module varied from institution to institution. Some institutions identified a greater proportion of modules with elements of Welsh Studies than others. This could be due to different interpretations and understandings of the Welsh Studies concept or that different institutions' curriculum and expertise are more conducive to the inclusion of Welsh Studies.

<u>Group Discussion</u>

8. The seminar was split into four groups to each discuss three questions relating to the development and advancement of Welsh Studies. Each group then reported back to the seminar with its comments. Here is a summary of the comments provided by all groups.

9. Question 1 - Discuss and generate a shared understanding of 'what is Welsh Studies?'

    - There was currently no shared understanding of Welsh Studies;

    - It was important that there was a definition of Welsh Studies as it would help shape work in HEIs and FEIs;

    - Clarification was needed on what could be included in Welsh Studies:

        o   Would it include the Welsh context or how subjects' addressed contemporary Welsh society;
        o   Would it include Welsh case study examples in Geology, the subject of Ancient History which would pre-date the notion of Wales, or subjects which were set in the framework of Welsh devolved laws and policies;

    - There needs to be research and publication regarding specific Welsh outputs;

    - What was trying to be achieved in the advancement of Welsh Studies;

---

[1] HESA Student Record 2011/12 - The figures represent the number of module identifiers returned on the module entity of the student record. Institutions can choose to return modules with no enrolments if they wish.

- If Welsh Studies was not created as a QAA subject benchmark could other subject benchmarks be amended to reflect Welsh Studies;

- Should the Welsh Studies aspect of a subject be assessed at module or programme level;

- Was there the demand for Welsh Studies to be included in more subjects for it to be sustainable;

- Welsh Studies was a very broad field including how people are trained to work in different locations;

- It needed to be defined more clearly where there was the potential to create benchmarking and where training was provided in a Welsh context;

- The experience of the students involved with Welsh Studies was important;

- There needed to be a measure of what percentage of Welsh Studies in an institution's provision was deemed to be good;

- It was important to ensure uniformity in terms definition, and who would respond to that request for data information.

10. Question 2 – How should the concept of 'Welsh Studies' be developed

- Institutions could define what Welsh Studies means for them, is it about local delivery or based on local expertise;

- Is there a need for Research Councils to consider how the funding of things Welsh are supported;

- This could be made more viable through a research led group but this would need to have funding attached to encourage academics and ensure that research would informed teaching;

- Funding changes to the University of Wales Press could undermine Welsh Studies;

- The lack of research and grants through Welsh Studies was harmful to its development;

- Welsh Studies in higher education should link up with similar aspects of the whole education system such as the Cwricwlwm Cymreig; Include the expectations of schools in this;

- The contribution of Welsh Studies to graduate employability such as the teaching in Wales or Civil Service in Wales. If the employability links were not promoted then there would not be the demand from students to make it sustainable;

- Should it be phrased Wales' Studies rather than Welsh Studies;

- Establishing a network could facilitate the sharing of best practice across Wales;

- Is it about specific modules or its spread across the curriculum;

- Could Welsh Studies be incorporated into the fee plan;

11. Question 3 - What are the next steps in advancing 'Welsh Studies'?

- Develop an Open Educational Resources platform for Wales, this would allow for Welsh Studies to feed into this and link with Welsh digital collections. There would be a potential for a MOOC in Welsh Studies;

- Need to have a greater focus across the whole education system;

- Work with non-traditional partners, such as the National Museum or the National Library;

- Develop academic networks in subject areas or on an interdisciplinary basis to take it forward. This is most likely to be effective if it is driven by research;

- Funding needs to be sustained for Welsh Studies;

- Balance the Research Excellence Framework expectations with being able to publicise Welsh focussed research;

- Establishing a definition would allow for measuring its advancement and provide a clear target;

- Need to establish whether the current position is insufficient and needs to be advanced;

- There needs to be assurances that employers would see the benefit of this.