

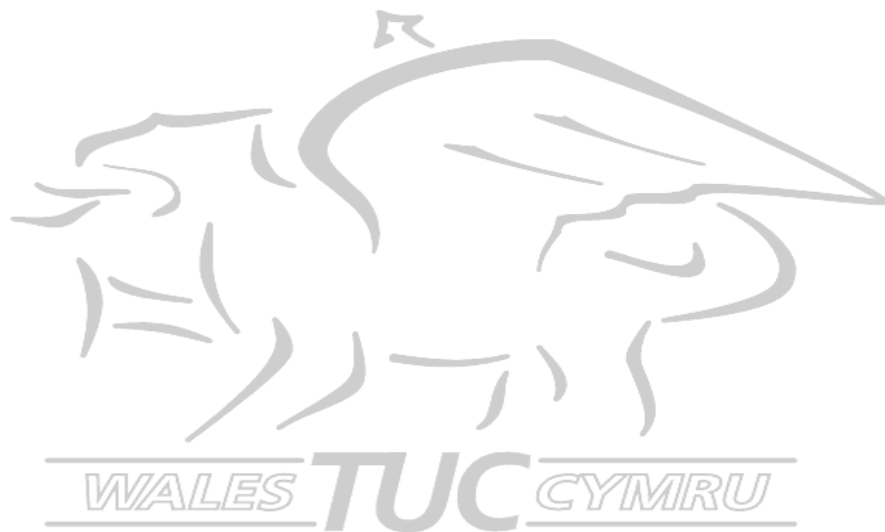
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**Date:** 8 June 2005  
**Time:** 9.00 - 12:30  
**Venue:** National Assembly, Cardiff Bay  
**Title:** Response to the Welsh Assembly Government consultation document - Wales TUC Cymru

Response to the Welsh Assembly Government consultation document

**Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales**

Consultation on the mergers with ELWa, the WDA and WTB



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The Wales TUC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Welsh Assembly Government consultation document "Making the Connections: the mergers with ELWa, the WDA and WTB". The Wales TUC represents 56 trade unions who in turn represent around half a million members across Wales.

## **Introduction**

The Wales TUC supports the merger of Education and Learning Wales (ELWa), the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) and the Welsh Tourist Board (WTB).

In particular, we support the proposal to dismantle the ASPB sector and assimilate its functions within the existing framework of government in order to promote greater accountability, better integration and a lack of duplication.

The Wales TUC is adamantly opposed to achieving the proposed efficiency savings through job cuts or redundancies. There are already staffing shortages in key public services particularly on the frontline and any job reductions are likely to compromise service delivery. We believe redeployment, retraining, secondments and other innovative ways to restructure the workforce must be considered, and not redundancies or job cuts.

The realisation of this new model of public service planning and delivery in Wales is highly dependent on an effective engagement with the workforce in Wales and their Trade Union representatives.

The Assembly is keen to develop effective employment practices throughout the Welsh public sector with employers adopting the best models and human resource strategies to underpin high quality Welsh public services. The Assembly needs to promote itself as a 'flagship employer' setting exemplary standards for others in the public service to emulate. Consequently, trade unions need to be involved in any high level change boards that are constituted.

The proposals also have important implications for the private sector as we have outlined and private sector unions should also be

represented. The Wales TUC looks forward to making an active contribution to its business in the future.

This consultation, even if not intended, does have a feel that it is looking outward, primarily from the WDA's standpoint. We are clear that these mergers affect not only the business sector but also education and the needs of various service users are necessarily different, not least within lifelong learning itself where education and workplace training are similar but different.

*1. What are your views on the proposed panels and their role?*

There is concern amongst trade unions that our involvement in key decisions in the future will be limited to the suggested advisory panels. We do not believe that this will suffice in helping to shape the future of the services because there is some scepticism of how much notice will be taken of them. Clearly we want to be members of the strategic advisory panels, but they need to have teeth and given a clear and unequivocal role in shaping policy. On the other hand, this is not a charge that could be levelled at the Ministers Strategy Group which we believe should include trade union representation. We believe that clear and full criteria and terms of references need to be set out for each advisory panel suggested for us to determine whether they will help shape future policy.

We believe that urgent attention needs to be given to the panel that will advise on commercial investment cases so that such advice is not waiting, pending the setting up of the panel.

One part of the consultation that is missing is that of how Departmental strategy is being shaped at the moment in readiness for the merger. In other words, if strategy has already been determined before the merger, how can the new panels be in a position to give advice on policy and delivery in the same way that the current boards do ?

## *2. Should there be others?*

We believe that clear and full criteria and terms of references need to be set out for any further advisory panel suggested for us to determine whether they will help shape future policy.

## *3. How large should these panels be and how frequently should they meet?*

We believe that the size of panels should vary depending what they do. For example, strategy discussions might make frequency of meetings every six months whereas the commercial investment panel will necessarily have to meet sooner.

## *4. How can we improve customer services and what services do you particularly value*

## *5. How can we work more effectively with customers and stakeholders in all parts of Wales?*

The Wales TUC believes that a key outcome of this exercise must be to provide a single point of contact, one-stop shops, for those who utilise current services. There does however appear to be a contradiction to this aim in that each new Department will each have four regional offices.

We are also concerned that the customer facing cultures of the ASPBs as they currently stand may be lost as they become part of a more risk averse civil service. This concern not only emanates from business but also from many of the staff likely to transfer, our members, who are committed to providing a high quality public service.

We welcome WAGs commitment to engage the workforce through effective working relationships with trade unions as crucial to the success of the new approach and believe that trade unions are well placed to help preserve the existing cultures and commitment within the ASPBs to both ensure their seamless transfer and to support staff in delivering their current high level service. The Welsh Assembly Government has signed a partnership agreement with its recognised trade unions and we would expect this agreement to underpin support to staff from WDA, WTB and ELWa as they transfer.

6. *What examples of excellent service delivery have you seen which the new organisations could learn from?*
7. *How would you expect the new departments to demonstrate results?*

We believe that the new Departments must be committed to providing high quality services and to demonstrate results.

8. *What more could be done to speed up decision making?*
9. *What currently gets in the way of effective delivery?*

The best way to speed up decision making in our view would be to ensure that key staff with responsibility for decision making are identifiable and that their responsibility is clear. One of the criticisms levelled against ELWa in the past was trying to find someone who could make a decision. Many organisations found themselves referred to different individuals in different departments causing log jams, intense frustration and crises for outside organisations waiting for urgent decisions. It is a lack of clarity in who has authority to deliver that can get in the way of effective delivery. We believe that there is potential for such difficulties to arise again in a newly merged organisation and therefore it is absolutely critical that clarity is built in to delivery systems before merger and not after.

10. *How would you like to communicate with the merging organisations?*

The Wales TUC would wish to have direct contact, and to meet with, senior civil servants.

11. *How should we involve recipients of services when developing new policies?*

The Wales TUC believes that the best way to involve recipients to enable them to participate fully in new policy development without any barriers to participation. This may mean involvement via a variety of accessible communication methods.

12. *How can the merging organisations develop people and help them to progress?*

We support the proposals to encourage greater inter-organisational and inter-sectoral movement of staff and managers, the general thrust of the Public Service Management Wales programme, and the intention to encourage more strategic approaches to human resource management across the country. If the thrust of staff opportunities is taken at its word, then career opportunities are likely to be generated. We believe that if staff are to access these opportunities, then transferable skills need to be placed on the staff development agenda.

13. *What training needs can you identify to meet the challenges and help to realise the potential benefits of mergers?*
14. *How can staff best be supported in the run up to mergers?*

Many people will not have had the experience of working within a newly merged organisation and as such we believe that training for staff in delivering these changes is going to be crucial to their success. This is especially true of those staff who are being told to work as normal, 'business as usual', yet tell their unions about the inordinate amount of time they are spending on merger issues.

In our view, the best way to identify training needs is to work with trade unions and their Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) network. The Wales Union Learning Fund is a perfect example of how WAG helps finance partnership working between unions and employers to identify training needs and to overcome barriers which may prevent people, for many reasons, accessing learning. We believe that this is a tried, trusted and highly effective method of identifying training needs which is supported strategically by WAG.

We do not believe that it is hypocritical to argue that whilst career progression is supported throughout the merged organisations, that there is still a need to nurture specialists. Indeed we believe that in order to underpin career progression, that people are enabled to access opportunities to train in specialist professions.

In order to support staff in the run-up to the merger, Wales TUC is of the view that a new partnership between the trade unions in Wales and the Assembly would herald a radically new industrial relations climate. The Assembly is keen to develop effective employment practices throughout the Welsh public sector with employers adopting the best models and human resource strategies to underpin high quality Welsh public services. The Assembly needs to promote itself as a 'flagship employer' setting exemplary standards for others in the public service to emulate.

The potential of devising generic public service contracts consisting of common terms and conditions is supported to lubricate the seamless movement of staff between different agencies and sectors, and promote enhanced career opportunities. However we do have concerns that the resources needed for human resource support to cover this have been under-estimated with no estimate yet for harmonisation costs.

