

# Education and Lifelong Learning Committee ELL(2) 09-03(mins)

## Minutes

**Date:** Wednesday 10 December 2003

**Time:** 9.30am - 12.30pm

**Venue:** Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

### Members

### Constituency

Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
Jane Davidson (Minister)	Pontypridd
Leighton Andrews	Rhondda
Jeff Cuthbert	Caerphilly
David Davies	Monmouth
Irene James	Islwyn
Mark Isherwood	North Wales
Denise Idris Jones	Conwy
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Owen John Thomas	South West Central

### Officials

Richard Davies	Group Director, Department for Training and Education
Elizabeth Taylor	Head, Schools Management Division
Judith Cole	Central Support Unit
Judith Nedin	Central Support Unit
Keith Davies	Head, Standards and Performance Division
Neil Thomas	Head, Lifelong Learning Division
Derek Adams	Head, Higher Education Division
Elizabeth Williams	Head, Youth Policy Team
Glynis Wilson	Higher Education Division

### In Attendance:

Shelia Drury	Chair, National Council-ELWa
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Elaine Allinson	Head of Funding and Special Projects, National Council-ELWa
Richard Hart	Interim Director of Learning, National Council-ELWa
Professor Roger Williams	Chair, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Steve Martin	Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Professor Philip Gummatt	Director of Higher Education, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

### **Committee Secretariat**

Chris Reading	Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Clerk
Ruth Hatton	Committee Support Officer

Item One: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Janet Ryder as a full Committee Member. The Chair expressed the Committee's thanks and recognition of the work undertaken by Helen Mary Jones.

1.3 The Chair noted that staff from Record of Proceedings would make a verbatim record of the National Council-ELWa agenda item. The record would be available in fifteen working days on the Assembly's website.

1.4 There were no declarations of interest.

### **Item Two: Minister's Report**

#### **Paper: ELL(2) 09-03(p.1) and Annexes**

2.1 The Chair invited the Minister to introduce her report to the Committee. The following points were raised:

- The Minister drew Members' attention to the schedule of secondary legislation at Annex B and suggested that Members inform the Clerk if they wished to raise any items in Committee, with as much advance notice as possible. The Minister confirmed that from next term, the annex of forthcoming secondary legislation would include an indication of the intended procedural route;
- The Minister said that she anticipated that the Higher Education Bill would be published before the end of January - to be considered by Committee on 28 January; and
- The Minister stated that she intended to reconvene the Student Hardship working group chaired

by Professor Teresa Rees. The group would include representatives from Scotland and England; the terms of reference would be published in due course.

2.2 During questions, Members raised the following issues:

### **Variable Top-Up Fees**

The Minister was asked to confirm if students domiciled in Wales but studying in England would be required to pay variable top-up fees. In response, the Minister stated that students domiciled in Wales but studying in England would be required to pay the fees levied by their chosen university. The Minister confirmed that there would be no top-up fees levied by institutions in Wales during the life of the current Assembly; students domiciled in Wales who attended higher education institutions in England would enjoy the same system of deferment of fees as those domiciled in England. There was some concern that the Welsh Assembly Government's policy could result in a large influx of students from outside of Wales to avoid paying top-up fees in England in 2006-2007. The Minister pointed out that the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) would be available to students from Wales wherever they studied.

### **Funding of Further Education (FE)**

The Minister noted the concerns raised by Fforwm in a recent letter to the Committee Chair and noted that the Minister was due to meet Fforwm shortly. Members felt that the Minister should take account of the various issues concerning funding FE when issuing her next remit letter to National Council-ELWa. The Minister noted these concerns and agreed with the Committee that the FE sector was pivotal in widening participation in lifelong learning.

### **14-19 Learning Pathways**

Members were concerned about possible implications for the current primary and secondary schools structure, best use of resources and implications for Welsh medium provision in light of the development of the 14-19 agenda set out in the Minister's report. Members were also concerned that there should be greater involvement by business and requested that the Minister consider proposals by businesses e.g. RESOLV. Some Members felt that concerns were addressed and that the system was working fairly well in Wales, with a particular focus on outputs. The Minister noted these concerns and pointed out that she welcomed participation by businesses and had met representatives of RESOLV and other management consultants and would give due consideration to their proposals.

### **Teachers' Workload Agreement**

Some Members were concerned that funding for the national workload agreement was insufficient for headteachers to provide meaningful support for teaching staff. It was thought that in some Local Education Authorities (LEAs), the funding allocated this year for the workload agreement was not

reaching those schools for which it was primarily intended. Members were also interested to know how discussions were progressing with the teaching unions, namely the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and UCAC. Some Members questioned the role of and need for higher level teaching assistants. Members agreed that the role of the qualified teacher was fundamental and should not be usurped by teaching assistants. The Minister acknowledged that there had been differing approaches to the allocation of the funds for the workload agreement by LEAs across Wales. The Minister said that statistics comparing funding between LEAs in Wales and England were made available to the Committee each year. An additional £33m had been made available to fund the workload agreement in Wales in 2004-05. The Minister stated that the Welsh Assembly Government would indicate how much of this money would be allocated to each LEA specifically but that this funding was not hypothecated. The Chair requested clarification on what formulae/basis the additional £33m was distributed. After consulting her officials, the Minister stated that the distribution of the funding used education factors within the formula for distributing Revenue Support Grant (RSG) to local authorities. The Department for Training and Education would monitor delivery of the workload agreement.

**Item Three: National Council-ELWa  
Paper: ELL(2) 09-03(p.2) and Annexes**

3.1 The Chair welcomed representatives of National Council-ELWa to the table.

3.2 A verbatim record of this item will be prepared by the Record of Proceedings department. It will be available on the Assembly's website in fifteen working days. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation can also be found on the Committee's pages on the Assembly website.

**Item Four: Higher Education - Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)  
Paper: ELL(2) 09-03(p.3) and Annexes**

4.1 The Chair welcomed representatives of HEFCW to the table. Higher Education Wales (HEW) had been due to attend the meeting but could not attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

4.2 The Chair invited Professor Roger Williams to introduce the paper. The following issues were raised:

- Both reconfiguration and collaboration were vital for strengthening and raising the profile of the higher education sector in Wales. There were currently too many small institutions in Wales;
- The merger between Cardiff University and the College of Medicine was proceeding well. Cardiff University was currently the only member of the Russell Group without a school of medicine. Exemplary leadership had been shown by the two institutions during the merger;
- HEFCW was remitted to assist institutions that wanted to merge/collaborate. Bangor and the North East Wales Institute of Education (NEWI) were being encouraged to merge, given their own inclination towards merger;
- The University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales Institute of Cardiff had publicly

declared their wish to merge. HEFCW was of the opinion that Wales needed a post-1992 major metropolitan university; and

- HEFCW was aiming to assist institutions in producing a much stronger, world-class higher education sector in Wales.

4.3 Steve Martin also made the following points:

- HEFCW had to act within the statutory and constitutional framework: they could not force institutions to merge but they could encourage merger and provide incentives. Institutions must have shared visions and commitment for any substantial reconfiguration and have well-developed/ argued business cases to justify public investment;
- Certain issues needed clarification from the outset of planning, which HEFCW could assist with: clarity of leadership, management structures, legal and constitutional issues (i.e. statutory corporations and royal charter) and the relationship with the University of Wales; and
- Reconfiguration meant a range of possibilities: from merger to the expansion of Welsh medium provision.

4.4 The Chair invited Members to raise questions and the following issues were raised:

### **Degree Quality**

There was some discussion from Members concerning whether students might feel that degrees awarded to them might be devalued as a result of merger. Professor Williams said that it was natural for students to feel this way, as it was sometimes difficult to switch allegiance to institutions, however, small institutions were vulnerable and institutions needed to exude world-class research. Steve Martin added that in terms of quality, there were established procedures with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

### **Culture/Mission**

It was felt that merging two different institutions and consequently, two different cultures might cause difficulty. Steve Martin explained that all institutions had their own cultures. It was important when discussing higher education institutions (HEIs) to distinguish between culture and mission. NEWI, characterised by its focus on outreach and participation contrasted to Bangor University, which was research driven, resulting in a difference in missions. The University of Glamorgan and UWIC were different but their missions were quite similar and complementary i.e. focus on e-learning and third mission activities.

### **Funding for Re-branding**

There was some interest as to what funds were available for re-branding. Professor Gummatt said that funding tended not to focus on individual levels of activity but was part of the overall business case but aspects such as re-branding would be taken into account.

## **University of Glamorgan/UWIC**

In response to some Members' concerns that negotiations appeared to be stalling, Professor Williams said that HEFCW had proposed that an advisory body be established, with three independent members, to assist the two institutions in overcoming the natural points of difficulty, which inevitably arose, when institutions began merger discussions. HEFCW would support and encourage the negotiations. Professor Williams also said that there was a need to examine the exact reasons for the slow progress of negotiations and learn the lessons.

## **NEWI and Bangor University**

Members were interested in progress of discussions between NEWI and Bangor University. The Committee heard that both institutions were energetically engaged in discussions and there was a feeling of goodwill between the two institutions. £250,000 had been allocated to help the two institutions undertake appraisal work. The vice-chancellor of Bangor University was hoping to produce a detailed business case by spring/summer 2004. It was felt that Bangor University and NEWI could be conscious of North Wales's proximity to larger developments such as University of Manchester and UMIST, over the border in England. One other issue that Bangor University and NEWI were considering was overcoming the issue of being geographically separated. There was also some discussion concerning the way in which University of Wales accreditation would fit in with a potential University of North Wales accreditation. Steve Martin said that legally, a university could not exist within another university however, the University of Wales was reviewing its role, for example in assisting the newer institutions to develop their capacity.

## **Welsh Medium Provision**

There was some concern from some Members that relatively few students had not been able to pursue courses through the medium of Welsh due to a scarcity of Welsh medium lecturers. Professor Gummatt said that preferential funding for the expansion of Welsh-medium provision in HE had been in place for a number of years. Institutions received an additional premium of 26% for courses delivered through the medium of Welsh. There was also the Structural Change Fund that contributed to this agenda. There was also funding for the core activity of increasing the number of lecturing staff able to lecture through the medium of Welsh. The first two top-up fellowships were also about to be announced.

## **Industry**

Members were interested to know if there was evidence to demonstrate that Industry supported reconfiguration and collaboration in the sector and whether it supported the sector financially. Steve Martin explained that there was some involvement from people in industry in the governance of HEIs. It was felt that industry recognised the competitive strengths of the HE sector. The Knowledge Exploitation Fund (KEF) also was a key factor in developments between HE and industry. In

comparison to other parts of the UK, Wales was faring well in this agenda.

### **Item Five: Draft Forward Work Programme - Spring Term 2004**

**Paper: ELL(2) 09-03(p.4)**

5.1 The Chair asked the Committee to ratify the forward work programme for the coming term. Subject to the following issues, the Committee ratified the programme:

- The Committee agreed to take-up the additional slot on 22 January to undertake an informal visit to schools in the Bridgend area for the purpose of information gathering for the special educational needs policy review;
- Jeff Cuthbert requested that the Committee discuss the suggested take-up of the identified additional slot on 1 April for a formal meeting. The Chair stated that this issue would be discussed at the first formal meeting of the spring term 2004.
- The Chair noted Janet Ryder's request for a slot for groups representing Dyslexia, to be incorporated into the work programme for the review of special educational needs.

### **Item Six: Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Paper: ELL(2) 08-03(mins)**

6.1 The Committee ratified the minutes of the meeting on 19 November 2003.