

European & External Affairs Committee

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Date: 12 October 2005

Time: 9.00 - 12.00

Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Title: Wales European Centre: Experiences & Lessons

The Wales European Centre (WEC) represents a wide partnership of Welsh stakeholders. Though WEC is not directly part of the merger process, the merger of WDA, ELWa National Council and WTB has led to the decision to cease operations by the end of November 2005.

Since its creation 12 years ago, the WEC has made a major contribution to the profile of Wales in Europe. As a leading "Brussels office", it has played a key role in engaging stakeholders across Wales with the policies and programmes of the European Union, increasing the value of projects and funding, and building Welsh profile and influence.

WEC members have made clear that they value the WEC service highly and agree on the continuing need for a comparable service to be delivered under the new arrangements. They also agree that the experience of WEC and its stakeholders can provide valuable lessons for continuing Welsh representation in Brussels. They have therefore collaborated to produce a document setting out the key features and lessons from this experience as an aid for future practice. These are summarised below.

Profile, Funding and Influence

Wales is well known and recognised in Brussels. A key reinforcing factor is the constant practical engagement of Welsh stakeholders with EU business at all levels. This comprises a wide range of activities including visits, round table meetings (including EC officials, other EU regions and related interests), networking and project development, small scale presentations to specialists or larger seminars or conferences attracting a broader audience or high profile decision-makers.

WEC provides a support service tailored to the needs and objectives of each member organisation, based on three key elements:

- Specific and targeted intelligence and networking;
- Proactive support for project development and the exchange of best practice;
- Proactive, early and direct engagement with policy development.

These activities have helped WEC members achieve a high level of engagement with policy and influence in Brussels and led to more and better projects and funding. This activity also continually builds the profile of Wales among EU decision makers and partners, and provides additional opportunities to ensure that future policies and programmes are better suited to the needs of Wales.

Added value

The WEC service has focused on adding value to the activities of its members and Team Wales as a whole. Key elements of the service have been:

- Proactive support – Stakeholders need ongoing help from Brussels insiders to interpret the significance of EU policies, highlight opportunities and risks, and directly assist them in formulating actions;
- Direct communication and support– Direct engagement between practitioners in Wales and advisers in Brussels leads to a better understanding of stakeholders needs and a speedier and more flexible reaction to opportunities;
- WEC’s customer-focused approach helps to deliver a tailored support service. Well defined service level agreements and work programmes help to achieve added value outcomes for all stakeholders;
- Practical knowledge and experience is at a premium in Brussels and the Welsh team there benefits from including people with specific knowledge and experience which they can call upon;
- Team Wales – the direct involvement of stakeholders working together in Brussels has been a much-copied element of Welsh success. Many of our key partner or competitor regions explicitly recognise the value of inclusive regional representations (e.g. Scotland, Catalonia, Valencia);
- Our members regularly highlight the value of WEC’s cross-sectoral knowledge and understanding which highlights common interests among Welsh partners. This has proved a valuable tool in bringing together practitioners and policy specialists across and within organisations, and across Wales.

Conclusions

Profile:

- Those people that implement policies on the ground and deliver projects have invaluable practical experience and can play an essential part in building the profile of Wales in Europe;
- They will need continuing support through the Assembly Government and/or alternative arrangements, and it is in the Welsh interest to ensure that this is maintained.

Team Wales:

- A flexible but consistent Team Wales approach has been a key part of Welsh successes in getting our voice heard in the EU. An active and inclusive partnership serving Welsh stakeholders in

Brussels needs to be maintained.

Comprehensive and tailored support:

- WEC's intelligence service to members has provided a mix of elements including a regular news service, briefings, and direct personal follow-up by phone, email and in person. Such a comprehensive and flexible support service is essential;
- A Brussels office needs to build and maintain an excellent understanding of its customers business. Frequent, regular and direct contact with practitioners is an important part of this;
- Partnership working should be part of the organisational culture and regarded as an essential skill;
- Any service should be customer focused with clear and regular opportunities for review and accountability.

Future support:

- Successors to the WDA, WTB and ELWa will continue to have direct delivery and intermediary roles and will need to link policy and delivery issues effectively;
- Their active engagement with EU business will need support from the Assembly Government EU office.
- The ability to have direct representation in Brussels is important to the maintenance of an inclusive partnership and contributes to the strength of Wales voice in Europe. Following the closure of WEC, alternative arrangements will be needed for some stakeholders;
- A presence for sectors such as higher education, the voluntary and community sector, and maybe others, should be actively encouraged and wherever possible facilitated by the Assembly Government.

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3 October 2005

Elements needed for Independent Research Study

Following review of the Expressions of Interest received and reconsideration of the initial specification of what is needed from an independent study of science and technology in Wales, the following areas are proposed – for further discussion – as key components of the analysis of "where Wales is currently world class" in science (and technology), comparing with rest of UK (and elsewhere, when appropriate).

Assuming that some of this work proceeded in parallel, it could probably be accomplished within six months.

1. Analysis of Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2001

The RAE provides data on the comparative research performance by Higher Education Institutions in Wales, in terms of the major scientific disciplines (university departments), based on submission by the departments, selecting their best research outputs (as scientific publications), to HEFCs. This information is used to inform HEFC (and other) funding decisions; the weakness is that the latest data are for the period up to 2001 and, so, may not reflect current performance, and that certain key aspects of research excellence (in particular, collaboration with industry and inter-disciplinarity) are not captured.

The data are publicly available and already well analysed; the additional task is to select and interpret key findings, trends and, perhaps, to use the identified cohort of departments judged world class to inform a round of consultation (visits, see section 4) in order to develop better understanding of what the leading groups themselves perceive as world class.

It should be possible to accomplish the desk phase analysis in-house by MRS plus Expert Adviser, preferably also drawing on expertise from HEFCW to understand the limitations and scope of the data.

2. Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometric analysis is based on the total count of published scientific papers and their pattern of publication. It is a traditional quantitative measure of the contribution of scientific research to knowledge creation. While comprehensive (whereas RAE only judges self-selected research output), at its simplest it is measuring numbers rather than relative quality and importance. More sophisticated analysis (for example, see RAND Expression of Interest) attempts to assign relative importance (by incorporating journal impact factor) but this is a relatively blunt tool and not very suitable for comparing across disciplines or for multidisciplinary research. It is most useful when comparing similar types of research across geographical regions (e.g. Wales versus rest of UK) or time periods. It complements RAE in being more up-to-date, in exploring patterns of collaboration and in providing international benchmarking.

Comprehensive, curated, bibliometric databases are not readily available and interpretation of the data requires skilled analysis. Two centres of expertise (who would have been sub-contracted by some of the respondents in their Expressions of Interest) are:

- Evidence Ltd,
- Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) at City University, London.

In their submission, RAND estimated £25,000 for bibliometric analysis, which they would subcontract at a cost of £15,000. Perhaps, £10,000 might be a reasonable goal for a comprehensive study but it

would be necessary to discuss specification with Evidence Ltd and CIBER. There might be another option, CaSE (witness on 6 October) also have access to people with a lot of experience in this area and we might be able to convince them to supply at least a summary analysis economically.

3. European benchmarking

One other complementary approach to evaluating current relative research performance by universities/companies in Wales (with time trend data) could be obtained from databases compiled of participants in EU-funded Framework Programme research projects. While the basic data are obtainable from the European Commission, this is again a somewhat specialised area to interpret; independent analysis would be aided by expertise from a group who do this type of analysis routinely. Of the respondents making Expressions of Interest, Beta Technology probably have most experience and only they highlighted this approach as a core component.

If Beta were to be invited to do this, it is not easy to estimate the cost by disaggregating their previous response. It might be cost-effective to ask Beta to augment an analysis of European research benchmarking with other small pieces of comparative analysis that they mentioned as useful to characterise university-industry relationships (recently-filed patents, creation of spin-out companies) and that would not be obtained from the analysis of publication data (tranches 1 and 2 above). £10,000 might be a reasonable estimate for the total in tranche 3.

It would be possible to do a much more detailed analysis of patents as a metric of world-class performance (assessing industrial exploitation of technology). Scientific Generics emphasised their ability to provide specialised patent mapping techniques at a cost of £15,000. But this does probably not merit such detailed attention as a key evidence strand, particularly as the industrial exploitation "demand side" will be covered by the oral evidence sessions during the Inquiry. It is recommended that patent mapping is not pursued as a separate tranche of activity.

4. Consultation with researchers/institutions

The Expressions of Interest noted that individual consultation is an important phase – in order to complement the quantitative analysis of databases. Individual consultations would provide valuable intelligence on current status; on the response from the research groups on the judgements that have been formed on them (from RAE etc); on future R&D potential; and, by providing case study material, will enrich the quantitative assessments.

While, ideally, a systematic attempt to consult would cover all of the Higher Education Institutions, an alternative approach would be to select out those who are already deemed world-class or who should otherwise be consulted as representative of the sector. It would also be essential to cover other public research bodies such as Health Authorities, Public Sector Research Establishments, Research Council (BBSRC) Institute(s), Research Technology Organisations. Furthermore, individual views might additionally be sought from companies/other stakeholders with research interests in Wales (in their

capacity as research producers or users) - a point that was emphasised in the Expressions of Interest from the Management Consultancies.

To an extent, it will be possible to capture some individual views, from both academic and industry research constituencies, during the oral evidence sessions of the Inquiry. It would also be possible to use the final collective discussion phase (see tranche 5 below) to access the spectrum of individual views. However, some scheduling of visits to collect individual perspectives, possibly with guidance from the Reference Group, would help to inform the final phase. But individual visits are time-consuming and expensive to contract out.

5. Final stakeholder workshop(s)

The preceding steps will generate a significant volume of analysis based on the quantitative (objective) data supplemented by qualitative (subjective) data on what Wales excels at in science (and technology). It would help to add an additional, external, review to question assumptions and emerging conclusions by scheduling a final discussion phase at a workshop, convened by EDT Committee. The workshop should be conducted by an independent expert group, for example drawn from the Reference Group, possibly in conjunction with HEW, in light of their considerable interests reflected in their work on a Science Strategy for Wales. The workshop would invite researchers and users of research.

In this case, it would be helpful if the Reference Group were to be kept aware of the objectives and actions embodied in all tranches of the work. The outputs from the workshop discussion, together with the analysis and conclusions from the previous tranches of work would be brought together in a report to serve as input for EDT Committee review. There might be merit in considering more than one workshop, regionally based in Wales, subject to resources available. The external cost is not likely to be very high, perhaps £5,000, but workshops require considerable administrative support (hence the attraction of subcontracting, for example to HEW).