

ELL 02-01(mins)

Minutes of Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Date: Wednesday 31 January 2001

Time: 2.00 p.m.

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly for Wales

Cynog Dafis, Chair	Plaid Cymru	Mid and West Wales
Lorraine Barrett	Labour	Cardiff South & Penarth
Jane Davidson, Assembly Minister	Labour	Pontypridd
Janice Gregory	Labour	Ogmore
Jonathan Morgan	Conservative	South Wales Central
Alun Pugh	Labour	Clwyd West
Owen John Thomas	Plaid Cymru	South Wales Central

Committee Secretariat:

Delyth Thomas	Committee Clerk
Brian Duddridge	Deputy Committee Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Committee Clerk

Officials:

Richard Davies	Director, National Assembly Training and Education Department
Elizabeth Taylor	Schools Management Division
Derek Adams	Further and Higher Education Department
Catrin Huws	Office of the Counsel General

Apologies:

Gareth Jones, Christine Humphreys, Huw Lewis and Pauline Jarman

Substitutions:

Owen John Thomas for Gareth Jones

Declarations of Interest:

Cynog Dafis Registered Teacher

Jane Davidson Registered Teacher

Huw Lewis Registered Teacher

Owen John Thomas Qualified Teacher

Lorraine Barrett School Governor

Agenda Item 1: Strategic Forward Work Programme

Paper: ELL 02--01(p.1)

1. The Chair advised the Committee that standing order 9.9 required

Committees to maintain a rolling programme of work. Members were invited to comment on the draft programme which set out the framework for the Committee's business over the next 18 months. Each subject committee's programme would be circulated to all subject committees for comment.

1. It was agreed that the bull points should be amended to fully reflect the

Committee's remit for 'tertiary education and training'.

Agenda Item 2: Framework Principles for Education and Training in Wales

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.2)

2.1 The Chair reminded Members that they had agreed to revise the framework prepared by the former Pre 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee to reflect the new Committee's wider remit. He felt that as the draft paper had been circulated only the day before, Members would need more time for study. The Minister agreed.

2.2 The Chair suggested that the Committee might want to consider whether they needed a framework paper. He would discuss the paper with the Minister at their next fortnightly meeting and consider its resubmission at a future meeting before Easter.

Agenda Item 3: Policy Review - Higher Education - Report by Professor Hobson

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.3)

3.1 Professor Hobson described progress to date as recorded in the paper and summarised some of the issues raised.

3.2 He gave details of the speakers who had agreed to give presentations to the Committee on each of the key themes. A timetable with the named of the speakers was provided to Members and would be published on the Committee's web page. Lord Dearing had also accepted an invitation to address the Committee on 17 May on life-long learning and other matters.

3.3 Professor Hobson made particular reference to the following - the need for Wales to have a world class research institution; that Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Wales were smaller than their UK counterparts and were under-funded when compared to other parts of the UK; that HE was a major resource for the economy; that factors such as geography, bilingualism, the population spread and transport infrastructure made HE in Wales more expensive to operate; that the current quality assurance system was over-burdensome; the need to change the culture of HE - to embrace, amongst other things, Information Technology (IT) and activities related to economic and cultural regeneration. He confirmed that the need for a framework for ending ethnic and gender discrimination should be extended to include all discrimination.

3.4 The Minister emphasised the National Assembly's commitment to further and higher education, financially and as a high priority, to tackling issues of social deprivation and reminded Members of the work being undertaken by the Investigation Group on Student Hardship and Funding. Professor Hobson was asked to provide information about the cost of student retention in Wales.

Agenda Item 4: Presentations by Higher Education Institutions

4.1 The Chair welcomed presenters and invited their presentations. All presenters drew on the material provided in their papers.

Welsh College of Music and Drama

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.4)

4.2 Mr Fivet pointed out that the National Assembly's report 'Culture in Common' had recognised the value of the College's work. The College collaborated with a number of educational institutions on an informal basis and also had links to the BBC National Orchestra and the Welsh National Opera.

4.3:

- how had the College developed its collaborative role with others?

The College's programme of collaboration was progressing well, amongst other things its student performers toured Wales on a regular basis and it undertook master classes at the National Eisteddfod. However, it was not easy to stretch College resources and what it was able to provide it did so as widely as it could.

- how would the College describe its status in relation to the University of Wales?

The College was a relatively small institution, it worked closely with Cardiff University on IT issues such as student records. It was not a part of the University of Wales but collaborated closely with it as the University of Wales validated the College's degrees.

- whether it was possible to gauge how many students from Wales studied music and drama in England when they could do so in Cardiff?

Mr Fivet agreed to provide the Committee with information about the number of students from Wales who went to study music and drama in England.

University of Wales, College of Medicine

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.5)

5.1 Professor Ian Cameron advised that in the last six years student numbers had doubled to 3,300 as the College sought to diversify its study base. The College provided a clinical service within the NHS and was accountable for that service which impinged on teaching and research time. Its research budget of £13.5m compared well to similar bodies in England. He pointed out that in 1991 there had been no female professors at the College, there were now 8 -15% of the

total number of professors.

5.2 The College had collaborative links with the University of Cardiff, it hoped to develop a partnership board with University College of Swansea and in the future with colleges in north Wales. There was scope for competition across the UK and wider, but in Wales the College preferred to operate in a complimentary way with other providers.

5.3 The Committee raised the following issues:

- what was the College's policy on student recruitment within Wales?

Professor Cameron said that 33% of students came from within Wales, competition to enter the College was high, he recognised the value of increasing that number but there would be no policy of positive discrimination to do so. The College was keen to increase its number of Welsh speaking students, also to widen scope for collaboration.

- what initiatives had been taken to secure national collaboration within Wales?

Arrangements were in place with colleges in north Wales and with Swansea and the College hoped that arrangements could be made with Gwent. The key was to play to the strength of each and not be in competition. However, extra funding to support the infrastructure to improve these arrangements would help

- was the College content with its partnership relationship with Cardiff and Swansea?

It was hoped that the existing collaboration with Cardiff University would prosper however, any movement to a merger might jeopardise the College of Medicine's all-Wales role as it might become seen as too Cardiff focused.

- what was the role of the University of Wales in relation to the College?

The University of Wales was the degree awarding body for medical and dental degrees.

University of Wales, Bangor.

Paper : ELL 02-01(p.6)

6.1 Professor Roy Evans made particular reference to the importance of research in the fields of science and technology and to the Talent Identification and Teacher Company Scheme Programmes. The College was about to enter a strategic alliance with the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education to enhance collaboration to further ensure the contribution of HE in

the region.

6.2 The Committee raised the following issues:

- how could a world class university be achieved for Wales which would enable Wales to compete on the international stage?

Professor Evans felt Bangor was a world class institution whose record in Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) enabled it to compete on the world stage. In this way the College could benefit from collaboration overseas and contribute to partnerships within Wales.

- statistics showed that the combined total of grants awarded to Cardiff, Bangor, Aberystwyth and the College of Medicine was £385m compared to £226m solely for Birmingham University, shouldn't Wales be doing better?

The College's success in attracting grants was reflected in the figure of £385m.

- was there a role for Bangor in strengthening the provision of Welsh medium higher education?

Professor Evans shared concern at the absence of more Welsh medium provision at HE level but advised that a reduction in the use of Welsh in 6th forms made it difficult to prioritise this

- how was Bangor tackling its deficit problem bearing in mind the size and age of its estate, many of its buildings having listed status?

Approximately 100 posts had been shed over the past two years in an attempt to reduce costs, current financial projections were encouraging. The financial cost of maintaining the College estate - of over 200 buildings - was high. The College had over the past five years earmarked £11.3m to redevelop the estate.

Trinity College, Carmarthen

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.7)

7.1 Representatives felt that Trinity was an unique institution, it was Wales' oldest College. Its location was central to the planning of higher education in west Wales, it catered for a wide variety of needs in the area and was regarded as a national centre for the professional development and training of teachers. The College had taken the lead with private providers to develop the Wales OnLine initiative.

7.3 The Committee raised the following issues:

- was it necessary for students to demonstrate a commitment to the Church?

Students were not required to attend Church.

- the College was seen to be operating in a 'niche' market, could it fit into a national strategy for HE?

The College recognised the need to rationalise teacher training provision but with 85% of its students coming from within a 50 mile radius it had much to offer.

- if the University of Wales ceased to provide a validation service for the award of degrees, how would Trinity cope?

Trinity was an associate college of the University of Wales and in partnership with the University of Glamorgan, any need to seek validation of its courses for the award of degrees could be tackled in collaboration.

- if the provision of Information Technology (IT) were rationalised who would take the overview?

The College would need to look in detail at any proposals to rationalise IT provision, it was regarded as a centre of international excellence.

- why was Trinity's administrative costs so high?

Trinity was continuing with a major restructuring of its administrative

facilities, a reduction in staffing levels might be necessary.

- was Trinity looking for an increase in funding to support its mission?

The College had a number of strategic alliances and was developing pathways to other Colleges, it was confident these would continue. It was not happy with the level of funding it received, which it felt did not reflect its contribution to teacher training and the provision of equal opportunity in west Wales.

- what role did the College see for itself in the work of Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs)?

It felt that it could contribute a bilingual setting for and support to the work of CCETs ensuring the provision of higher education through the medium of Welsh. As a provider it focussed on re-admissions and second chance opportunities.

University of Wales College, Newport

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.8)

8.1 The College regarded itself as a family/community university that provided

a range of added values in the learning and enabling process. The College had approximately 3,000 full-time and 6,000 part-time students of whom some 76% were from Wales. It catered for professional courses which provided essential back-up for small and medium enterprises. To provide the best support to its teaching staff - and consequently to students and business needs - the College had to keep itself abreast of developments in the fields of research and scholarship. It enjoyed working in a federal structure with the opportunities for collaboration that that provided. The College was proud of its independent standing as a higher education institution.

8.3 The Committee raised the following issues:

- what was the position with the proposed merger with Lampeter University and did the National Union of Students have concern for the proposal?

Professor Overshott said that talks with Lampeter were in their final stages,. he was therefore unable to discuss them at this time.

- if the College had difficulty in supporting research should it not concentrate on teaching?

He confirmed that the College's research work was essential to ensure teaching staff were kept up to date on developments in the business and commercial world. Some of their departments, for example photography, were well regarded in the UK, it was essential not only to maintain standards but to progress.

- what was the Colleges view of a 'one country, one university'?

The University of Wales was held in world regard, Newport would wish to remain a part of the University.

- had there been a decline in student applications or of the number of mature students?

In his experience student self-support now included employment in term time as opposed to holiday work. He felt the present system of support through grants and loans created enormous difficulties and hampered equality of opportunity. Higher education institutions needed to market themselves carefully with these problems in mind. There had been a decline in student numbers over the past 5 - 10 years as more students had taken the opportunity to enter HE at age 18 years. The provision of life-long learning and the need to provide career-changing opportunities meant that the College needed to advance and secure a wide variety of provisions.

- did the College's 'film school' have links to the College of Music and Drama?

The College regarded its art, design and photographic capabilities as an example of excellence.

Cardiff University

Paper: ELL 02-01(p.9)

9.1 Professor Sir Brian Smith confirmed that the University supported the views expressed by Higher Education Wales (HEW) in its response to the consultation exercise. Its research income had doubled and the University was now in 11th position and in the top half of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities, above, for example, Birmingham University. 80% of its research staff qualified at grade 4 and above with 50% at Grade 5 or above. If the success of the University of Wales, College of Medicine were added to that of Cardiff they would compare well with other larger universities. Cardiff had valuable partnerships with the Colleges of Medicine and of Music and Drama, particularly in the fields of recruitment and marketing. Future reductions in bureaucracy should create greater opportunities for provision for students and research work.

9.2 The Committee raised the following issues:

- what would be the minimum size for a world class university and what would be needed to for Cardiff to be in the top ten of research led universities?

Primarily large institutions featured in the Russell Group, the critical mass and quality of an institution's work was vital.

- where departments were not operating at grade 4 or 5 on a national scale, how would Cardiff ensure academic excellence?

Collaboration from the bottom up, which encouraged diversity - where needed - would help promote excellence.

- why did Cardiff not support a federal approach to provision?

Cardiff noted that The University of Wales itself had explored a federated approach but this had failed, however it continued to look for opportunities to co-ordinate meetings and joint funding.

- how could the various research departments combine their activities for the benefit of Wales?

As with other institutions Cardiff collaborated with those of like interest and capability. Professor Smith recognised that institutions needed to look closely at how best to stimulate collaboration,

this was something for all Vice-Chancellors to consider, along with incentives for smaller departments. It would be a valuable step forward.

Agenda Item 5: Minutes of 17 January Meeting

Paper: ELL 01-01(min)

10.1 The minutes were agreed.

10.2 He reminded Members that the Committee would next meet on Thursday 8 February to hear presentations from the other 9 higher education institutions.