

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Presentation on behalf of UCAC

SUFFICIENT FUNDING

It is vital that sufficient funding is allocated for higher education, and this Union believes that the **way** in which our colleges are funded needs to be changed substantially and the **amount** provided increased considerably. Funding needs to be considered according to what is currently happening in our colleges and the challenges facing them over the coming years. Our universities should be afforded equality of opportunity by ensuring that the funding per student is equal to the funding in England and is moving towards that which is available in Scotland. The differing needs of our universities should also be recognised and a financial formula created to reflect these. Any proposed increase in funding must be considered in the context of the substantial contribution made by our higher education colleges to the local and national economy of Wales.

REGULATING SALARIES

It is essential that lecturers' salaries are regulated according to the Brett Report throughout Wales. Consistency is needed in order to attract teachers and researchers of the highest standard to our institutions and we must be aware of the need for such a strategy to keep teachers and researchers in these institutions.

CONTRACTUAL SECURITY FOR LECTURERS

If higher education is to look forward to the future confidently, the lecturers also need to face the future in the same spirit. Too much use is made of short-term contracts in our higher education institutions. It could be argued that there is a culture of short-term contracts in the sector. This could deter potential candidates of the highest caliber from applying for posts in our institutions. It could also be argued that short-term contracts do not give lecturers the necessary encouragement to plan their teaching and research in the longer term.

THE WELSH LANGUAGE

This Union believes that the higher education sector in Wales has a responsibility to provide education through the medium of Welsh. That which occurs in our higher education institutions, where almost everything is taught through the medium of English, affects the primary, secondary and further education sectors. As the Welsh language provision at university level is insufficient, continuity is lost, which adversely affects the language. Welsh medium education in our institutions needs to be extended, and this will require long term financial investment in order to be able offer such provision.

We should:

- ◆ create a specific strategy to ensure that a substantial number of staff are appointed to teach primarily through the medium of Welsh so that it is possible to increase the number of subjects available through the medium of Welsh.
- ◆ create a language training programme for the higher education sector in order to increase the ability and confidence of staff who speak Welsh and help them to teach through the medium of Welsh.
- ◆ create a programme which allows lecturers who are unable to speak Welsh to have time to learn the language.
- ◆ create a Welsh language skills programme for students studying subjects through the medium of Welsh and ensure that such programmes are accepted as a particular qualification recognised by the higher education sector.
- ◆ create a programme that provides students who are unable to speak Welsh with the statutory encouragement to learn the language and link these courses to their degree courses.
- ◆ create a Welsh language skills programme for students which will prepare them for posts in the public sector.

Such programmes would prove to be most successful as part of a framework that offers the best value for investment in the Welsh language as requested by this Union.

WELSH FEDERAL COLLEGE

This Union calls for a Welsh Federal College - a college that will create a network of lecturers, researchers and students throughout the colleges in Wales. In a climate that makes use of new technology and new methods of teaching, full consideration of an institution of this kind is timely.

This Union considers the Welsh Federal College as one that will be a part of every higher education institution in Wales and offers full courses and individual modules through the medium of Welsh. The teaching would require the higher education sector to make use of the Internet, video conferencing and residential courses. To ensure that a venture of this kind succeeds, a team would need to be appointed to provide guidance and administrative support.

Establishing a Welsh Federal College would make appropriate use of the investment in the Welsh language suggested above, and would also offer a model for courses in our colleges that wish to experiment with new methods of teaching. It would also be a prominent aspect of the inter-institutional work currently taking place.

RESOURCES AND MATERIAL

This Union wishes to acknowledge the work which is already taking place in our higher education institutions to prepare Welsh medium resources and materials. Establishing a Welsh Federal College would create a mechanism to co-ordinate the work and allow appropriate collaboration, which would avoid duplication.

There is a precedent for this kind of co-ordination in Wales. The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) has a system of prioritisation in collaboration with teachers in the primary and secondary sector, and there are plans in the pipeline under the leadership of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). We call for sufficient funding in order to create a national model for the higher education sector.

ATTRACTING STUDENTS

We are a country with a unique language and culture. This distinctiveness could be a means of attracting students to our institutions from different parts of the United Kingdom and from other countries who share a similar linguistic and cultural fabric. Indeed, such input is vital for our academic and non-academic health.

This should not mean that we disregard our own country. Wales is the only country in Europe where the majority of its students leave their country in order to undertake higher education. We must ensure that we create programmes that will develop a close relationship between the community and our institutions, and we must re-consider the organisation of higher education so that it responds to our pupils' requirements and demonstrates an awareness of the needs of our students.

LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY/IN THE HOME

This Union would like to congratulate the colleges on the work being done in the higher education sector in relation to experimenting with new teaching methods, which facilitate access.

However, the Union is anxious to stress that adequate funding needs to be secured for schemes which make use of new technology and community projects which offer learning opportunities to the public. Our institutions have a duty to ensure open access for a wide range of people who wish to undertake higher education courses, and it is the duty of the Assembly to support the efforts made by these institutions.

In any discussion on attracting students, consideration should be given to the fees and maintenance grants/loans system.

ABOLISHING STUDENT FEES

It is this Union's policy to call for the abolition of student fees. The system of paying student fees needs to be reconsidered - a system which impedes access and means that adults are dependent on their parents. This kind of system creates a culture of dependency and the implications cause uncertainty for individual students and adversely affects our institutions. We need to look in detail at alternative ways of funding higher education institutions including partnership and sponsorship methods.

RE-INTRODUCING MAINTENANCE GRANTS

Re-introducing maintenance grants is linked to the abolition of fees and again there is a need to reconsider the grants system. The present situation overwhelms students for years and there is no doubt that this is often a disincentive to pursuing an academic career.

The abolition of fees and the re-introduction of maintenance grants in Scotland saw a considerable increase in the number of students in Scotland choosing not to go to England and beyond to study. This kind of population stability would be beneficial to the economic and social health of Wales.

Gruff Hughes and Dilwyn Roberts-Young
UCAC
23 May 2001