

## Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

### AUT Presentation for the ELL Committee's Review

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### Theme 1

The Unit of Resource:

Costs, Real Money and Equity

When the Committee has sifted its evidence it can reach *one definite conclusion*: Welsh HE suffers markedly from the present mechanism for determining the distribution of central (UK) funds. The Assembly will be as hamstrung as, previously, the Welsh institutions, in furthering its ambition to raise the standing of Welsh HE and to ensure its central and essential position in the cultural and economic development of Wales. This is as true for vocational and undergraduate education and training as it is for research. The most crucial point in this is that for training, education and research, the benchmarks are established on an international playing field: educational borders are quite separate from political borders.

In the UK the Barnett Formula is at the heart of the problem for it fails, obviously and inequitably, when applied to HE funding. A population-based algorithm may be appropriate for schools and further education, since they necessarily draw on a local-area clientele, but it is disastrous when used to calculate funding for higher education. The non-local and indeed international mix to be found in a university is essential, academically, culturally and economically.

The absurdity of the Barnett Formula approach to HE funding is nowhere more apparent than in the anomalies highlighted when one compares funding for Welsh institutions with those of

Scotland. (Table on Welsh and Scottish institutional funding.) Swansea has 2000 more students to teach than St. Andrews but has the same central budget for the task; Edinburgh has some 3000 more students than Cardiff and has to struggle through on only twice the funding.

The Welsh institutions have come to expect, in each annual funding letter, a round of retirements and redundancies and the further degradation of standards that comes from over-full classes, poor equipment and facilities. More students enhance the standing of an institution but only if they can be retained and taught and supported. Casualisation, especially, reduces the possibility of an appropriate development of effective staff/student relationships and the important support needed to students who, more than ever before, can spend less time on their studies (due to the need for paid employment) and face larger problems in finding the means to pay for their continued studies.

## **Theme 2**

Without Borders: The importance for Teaching and Research of Human Income.

Students and staff make the institution, and research and learning must present, and represent, an international standing. Arguably, an international reputation in learning and research can only be created and sustained by an inter-dependent mix of staff, students and courses. Welsh institutions recognise the importance of their local and national staff and student population but they know and value, too, the cosmopolitan essence of the university. Economically, almost half of the students in Welsh institutions come from other UK, EU and overseas countries (44% of the student population).

Aside from the benefit to the perceived standing of an institution and an important cultural and academic variation, we must not forget that this inflow represents a significant injection – sometimes a crucial injection – into the local economy.

Globalisation is about making your product attractive to an international market. Academe was global before anyone cared to point out that a global perspective was economically necessary. Whom we teach, no less than what we teach, determines our ability to survive where the benchmark for quality is not open to claim that one possesses Degree Awarding Powers.

Welsh institutions have to stand in the international market place or cease to be universities. They have to carry out research and offer programmes of study that are as useful to an Italian as they would be to a Patagonian. One aspect of globalisation is the growing availability in every country of undergraduate institutions and courses and it is likely, therefore, that the future international income for our institutions will be through research and research students.

Again, then, to compete in this area we would need funding that is at least as good as that enjoyed by other UK institutions.

Facilities have been stretched to breaking-point by a ten-year history of under-funded expansion and those facilities determine the potential both for research and staff. The equipment must be equal to the task and, as vital, we must be able to attract leaders – and those who would be leaders – to our institutions. In the case of staff, Welsh institutions have benefited from the stagnation of academic pay because some of our most able teachers and researchers would lose financially, and significantly, by leaving Wales. At the same time, of course, we lack the funds to draw-in such leaders from major UK and international centres of learning.

The pressure already exists to all but guarantee a significant movement in UK academic pay in the life of the next parliament (and this is not merely an AUT wish). Unless the funding formulae change, Wales will lose its able and its young staff to England and Scotland, without the prospect of attracting their equivalent by way of exchange.

### **Theme 3:**

#### Meeting the Future

In our full submission to the Review (for example, page 27) we indicated some vital areas where economies of scale would not only release future funding but would also create the conditions necessary to an effective national higher education strategy. Our advice echoed Robertson's report to the Welsh Funding Councils on the infrastructural needs of credit-based learning. To enable the kind of flexibility and freedom to move (within, especially, but also outside Wales) that will be essential for life-long learning and the gradual educational and technical development of the Welsh workforce, three elements have to be put in place:

- a national student database;
- a shared regulatory framework for the award of credit and degrees;
- a single quality assurance regime.

The database, the student record, is the source of the majority of relevant financial and managerial information for the institutions, for the Funding Council, for Assembly and for the UK government. Its present disintegration – with a separate database for each institution, including an extra for the University of Wales – inhibits student enrolment and movement between institutions and creates very significant costs in the attempts by various agencies to piece the information back together, given the inevitable differences in terminology and meaning adopted by the different administrations. The lack of a fully shared regulatory

framework is one route-cause of the informational anomalies. It also builds, rather than removes, the barriers to movement for students and denies the necessary base for cooperation between institutions. The same regulatory differences calls for a significant duplication of quality assurance measures.

This need not, and does not, imply the need for a single national university and the AUT has no mandate from its Welsh members to recommend any of the models that, from time to time, have been suggested to this Committee. Indeed, for one member or another, each of the models offers greater problems over any useful development.

There is, however, a genuine concern amongst our members to the threat that many of the models represent to their individual communities, for the universities and colleges *are* communities. They can share and they collaborate and cooperate, but there is in tradition and a working methodology that imparts a real value to the concept of a collegiate organisation. They, more readily federal structures, permit the essential exchanges that lead to inter-disciplinary developments and research and they create, too, a sense of membership and ownership that contributes to the enhancement and maintenance of standards.

Measures can and should be taken to reduce the inevitable costs of sustaining the sector and the learning communities that represent its substance. However, whatever vision may be applied, the AUT feels that a structural model cannot overtake or significantly reduce the effect of a comparatively impoverished financial support.

We would hope that the review shows clearly the state of the playing field and recommends to the Assembly the fundamental need to equalise funding as an essential first-step to the enhancement of what is a strong, essential and successful part of the Welsh economy.

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