

An analysis of responses received to the questionnaire

Background

A brief summary of responses was circulated to the Committee on 18th January 2001. This listed the main areas of consensus arising from the responses to the questionnaire and suggested questions to help move the debate forward. Particular issues were explored with individual HEIs based on their submissions. General issues will be explored during presentations by guest speakers on the main themes.

This document is a more detailed analysis of the responses to the questionnaire. It covers the points of consensus, lists issues raised by individual respondents, provides individual, attributable comments and lists again some of the issues to be tackled.

Space does not permit reproduction of every relevant contribution to the points made. Quotations and references therefore are provided as examples of responses received rather than an exhaustive list. Reference should be made to individual submissions in order to appreciate the full context of the comments. Direct quotations and paraphrases of statements are attributed either within the text or in footnotes. The former are identified by the use of italics. In the footnotes, the full title of an institution/organisation is used in the first instance, thereafter the shortened form is used.

General Comments

It is generally agreed that Higher Education is part of a huge global market which is changing rapidly. Major changes have been:

- the move from a small, elitist market to mass participation in HE;
- student funding arrangements and the consequent perception of the student as consumer;
- a move from traditional forms of passive delivery of knowledge to a student centred approach facilitated by developments in information and communications technology (ICT);
- the emergence of new providers of HE in the form of company universities and private for-profit organisations.

1. Size and shape of HE

1.1 Context

HE institutions in Wales are relatively small organisations when compared with their competitors in the UK and overseas. Although size does not in itself guarantee quality, large institutions (or groups of collaborating institutions such as the White Rose group of universities in Yorkshire) are better placed to achieve economies of scale and to maintain diversity of provision in an increasingly competitive market. Cardiff, for example, is only 32nd in size in the UK. Glamorgan is 23rd in the list of 35 new universities¹. Several other HEIs in Wales have a student population well below 8,000 FTES (full-time equivalent students).²

There is growing competition amongst HE providers. This is made possible by advances in information and communication technology (ICT) which can serve vast markets. Indeed they **must** attract large markets in order to justify the considerable investment required. Universitas and GUA are examples of HE providers on a large scale.

When institutions of considerable size and reputation such as Aston and Birmingham or Leeds Metropolitan, Bradford and Huddersfield are proposing merger as a means of maintaining their global position, HE in Wales must at least consider whether it can afford to continue with the status quo of relatively small institutions.

The issue of critical mass relates both to HE's role in teaching and in research. NATFHE recognises this need *"we need a strong Welsh vocationally oriented university to compete with the larger English universities and provide an institution of size, scope and diversity which could serve the needs of Welsh students and the Welsh economy."*

Respondents to the questionnaire differ in their views on how a change in the shape and size of HE can and should be achieved. Solutions range from merger (15% of HEIs) to collaboration (70%) and confederation (15%). Various collaborative groupings are proposed – some based on regional considerations, others on the type of market [see the responses from Professor Scott, FEDA, University of Glamorgan, NUS].

Parity in the ability to recruit is an issue that is raised in connection with the size of HE in Wales.³ The English Funding Council recently permitted a 4% growth in the maximum number of students per institution after some years of no permitted growth. Institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all reported feeling the effects of this.

1.2 General

The section on the shape and size of HE generated the lengthiest and most passionate responses - largely because of the perceived possibility of compulsory merger. HEFCW's paper on mergers issued in 1999 caused unrest amongst the sector. *"HEFCW's report on the scope for institutional mergers has been a*

¹ Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

² HEFCW Profiles for Higher Education Institutions in Wales

³ Higher Education Wales

*destabilising event*⁴.” The section in the questionnaire relating to the shape and size of HE has been taken as directly relating to the merger issue.

The Welsh Funding Councils’ response to the questionnaire⁵ recognises that HEIs have fixed costs independent of institutional size but refers to discussions taking place in the rest of the UK regarding closer co-operation as a means of reducing overall costs.

Several respondents make comparisons between the relatively small size of Welsh HEIs and their counterparts elsewhere in the UK or overseas. Most accept that it is necessary to achieve a critical mass to ensure financial stability.

Collaboration rather than merger receives the greater support. Respondents cite examples of existing successful collaborations though there seems to be limited evidence of strategic planning in these arrangements. There **does** seem to be scope for reducing costs by collaborating on support services such as student administration systems, student services etc. [See the responses from CBI, Bangor, Fforwm, HEW, WNB, NATFHE etc]. It is also accepted that effecting any fundamental change in the shape of HE will require developmental funding, hence any cost benefits will not be immediately apparent.⁶

HEFCW’s submission encourages collaboration but points out that there is a need for clarity of purpose in any proposed partnerships. “The permutations and combinations of developments based on, for example, overlapping or complementary missions, subject coverage, geographical coverage and relationship to the University of Wales ... are numerous.”⁷

One of the strongest messages to emerge from **all** the responses to the questionnaire is that **current** funding mechanisms encourage competition between HEIs rather than collaboration. “*There is little incentive for institutions to collaborate effectively.*”⁸

HEW suggests that there could be some benefit in examining the consortium and collaboration mechanisms in Scotland.

Adequate and appropriate funding is seen as the key to a successful HE sector in Wales. In submission after submission, respondents voice concern about the lack of parity in funding between Wales and England and, even more so, between Wales and Scotland which is seen as being the closest parallel to Wales [HEW, AUA], Under the proposed settlement for 2001-2, Welsh HEIs will receive on average £18 less per student than in England and £1,355 less per student than in Scotland⁹.

This inequality is further exacerbated by the extra demands placed on the sector by the need to improve its bilingual provision and the difficulties caused by population spread and a poor transport infrastructure.¹⁰ Respondents point out that continued

⁴ HEW – similar comment from AUA

⁵ The Higher and Further Education Funding Councils made a joint submission but for simplicity we have referred to this by the acronym for the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) as this is the one used by the HEIs

⁶ HEFCW, University of Wales Swansea; NATFHE

⁷ HEFCW

⁸ University of Wales

⁹ The Guardian, 9 Jan 2001

¹⁰ Prof Scott’s personal submission

underfunding will severely limit the ability of Welsh HEIs to recruit and retain students and staff of the right calibre¹¹.

1.3 Diversity

Maintaining the diversity of HE is seen as essential by almost every respondent including those from external bodies and the professions - both in terms of courses offered and pathways into HE. Students should be able to choose from *“a range of quality provision offered in different modes of study and in a variety of locations”*.¹² *“Higher Education must be as diverse as the society it exists to serve.”*¹³ *“The presence of HE institutions in every region is a strength (not found in any other nation in the UK).”*¹⁴

It is accepted, however, that not every institution should be expected to do everything or to the same intensity.¹⁵ It is recognised that some institutions, for example, serve niche markets eg WCMD, Trinity. Institutions should also play to their strengths and even more so should take account of their individual missions. Several respondents advocate establishing Centres of Excellence for particular disciplines, especially in high cost specialisms.

Unnecessary and wasteful duplication should be avoided whilst maintaining the opportunity for students to access particular disciplines in various parts of the Principality. The WDA commented, for example, on the fragmented and unco-ordinated approach to ICT projects which has led to numerous small-scale projects and duplication of effort. Fforwm states that *“Diversity needs to be encouraged within a more responsive planning framework.”*

Trinity College, Carmarthen sum up the task before HE - *“The goal must be to secure the pattern of diversity that most cost-effectively meets the needs and aspirations of the greater number of stakeholders.”*

Maintaining a range of institutions throughout Wales enables HE to become accessible to all Welsh students. Although this need may, in part, be met in future through technological developments, this will not suit every student. *“Certain types of learners may have their needs met in future by new, globalised HE provision .. it will not, however, negate the need for diversity within Wales.”*¹⁶

Diversity allows institutions to respond to **regional** socio-economic needs. Several respondents say HE provision should be linked to the needs of community, industry, commerce and should be better informed by market analysis. However, the view is also expressed that Higher Education should not be tied solely to changing economic markets and that it should be valued for its own sake.

1.4 The Case for Merger/Collaboration/Confederation

As already stated, there is limited support for merger – it is seen as a threat, externally imposed and as a reaction to crisis situations.¹⁷ Any proposed merger

¹¹ HEFCW

¹² Cardiff University

¹³ NUS

¹⁴ University of Wales Bangor

¹⁵ Cardiff; HEW; University of Wales Aberystwyth

¹⁶ OU

¹⁷ Swansea Institute of Higher Education

should have explicit objectives and transparent benefits and be able to demonstrate that *“it will produce a new institution which gains competitive advantage, is more efficient and better equipped to cope with the ever-increasing demands placed upon it”*.¹⁸

Proposed mergers should take into account the financial, geographical, demographic, cultural, historical and mission factors. Even more important are the needs of the students. The NUS argued eloquently for this, rather than for administrative or economic convenience, to be the primary concern in any planned merger. A mutually agreed merger may be a good option for institutions. Indeed, many of the current HEIs in Wales are the result of past successful mergers. An example of an effective merger is seen as that of Coleg Normal and UW Bangor. *“When complementarity exists between the operations of two institutions, the whole may be greater than the parts.”*¹⁹

Mergers can, however, mean forfeiting some advantages²⁰ – HEIs interact with their local communities both culturally and in business ventures – mergers based on non-geographical considerations can hamper such interaction. Mergers that ignore geographical considerations are frowned on by the majority of respondents though one favoured the idea of *“new alliances uninhibited by geographical or sectoral boundaries.”*²¹

There is much more support for collaboration - between HEIs, FE/HE and between HE and industry/commerce. Instances of existing collaborations are quoted though the extent of the collaboration is not quantified in terms of student numbers, income etc. However, the impression is that these originate mostly from informal networking than from strategic planning.

The benefits of collaboration are acknowledged. These include -

- ❑ reducing duplication of provision whilst maintaining diversity;
- ❑ making the optimum use of scarce resources;
- ❑ achieving economies of scale - particularly with reference to support services such as finance, personnel, marketing, careers service;
- ❑ providing better opportunities to exploit ICT developments, enabling courses to deliver student-centred learning at times, and in places, convenient to the individual whether s/he is studying on or off campus;
- ❑ pooling resources to invest in quality distance learning materials for both the home and international markets;
- ❑ providing opportunities for talented individuals or embryonic research units to work with more established groups;
- ❑ developing critical mass, leading to centres of excellence in research or teaching;
- ❑ facilitating seamless progression between FE and HE,²² between HE institutions and between modes of study.

However, references to collaboration are in very general terms. It would be helpful if the extent of collaboration could be quantified to see whether the positive rhetoric translates into action and whether informal collaboration is in fact producing the kind of HE sector that Wales needs.

¹⁸ Cardiff

¹⁹ Prof Smith’s personal submission

²⁰ AUT

²¹ University of Wales College, Newport

²² Coleg Llandrillo

A high proportion of respondents make the point that existing funding mechanisms **discourage** collaboration - especially in research. Several take this further and are of the opinion that current funding mechanisms actually promote mission-drift and conformity. *“There is a concern that competition in student recruitment, the continuing drive for efficiency pushes too many institutions into trying to occupy the same common ground resulting in uniformity of mission and provision.”*²³ The concern is that HEIs feel obliged to bid for funding, even though *“the initiative/allocation may be of limited benefit to them either financially or strategically.”*²⁴ It is felt that funding formulae and policy initiatives should be mission-sensitive and should build on institutional strengths [See comments by Cardiff, CBI, Trinity, OU].

With the growing competition from company universities, private for profit institutions as well as from other UK universities [See comments by University of Glamorgan and NUS], it is felt HEIs in Wales need to cooperate both to seize the opportunities offered and to combat any threat. Wales is seen as lagging behind in seizing global opportunities.

Confederation within an enlarged University of Wales is an option considered by some. Cardiff University categorically rejects the federated option – seeing it as increasing bureaucracy and limiting an HEI’s ability to respond quickly in a competitive environment. The NUS’ response lists both the benefits and disadvantages of the federated system. NEWI and Swansea Institute express the wish to become equal partners within the University of Wales.

Having seen the benefits resulting from the University of Glamorgan’s collaboration with its network of FE partners, Trinity College, Carmarthen advocates a more wide-ranging vision of confederation to include HE, FE, the voluntary organisations and LEAs. Fforwm also expresses the need for *“a coherent federated or regionalised framework”*.

If confederation is to be the route taken, the Committee any need to seek some clarification of the role of the University of Wales. UWIC, Aberystwyth and the University of Wales itself refer to its role in maintaining standards. Other members stress their autonomy and the fact that the University of Wales has devolved much of its functions to the individual institutions. Cardiff University expresses the concern that *“Care must be taken, as former colleges of higher education come under the University of Wales’ umbrella, that the missions of neither new nor old members of the University of Wales are diluted and that heterogeneity is promoted.”*

1.5 A sector that is dynamic and responsive to change

The HE sector feels it can easily demonstrate that it has already adapted well to change –

- by increasing from 10% participation rates among 18-25 year olds in the 80s to over 30% by 2000;
- by widening access (achieving a 15% success rate compared with the UK total of 12%);

²³ Trinity College, Carmarthen

²⁴ HEW

- ❑ by adopting new technologies – though this has been on a very limited scale (e-mail, video conferencing) and much more far-reaching developments need to be considered;
- ❑ by introducing modularisation and extending credit-based learning through to FE;
- ❑ by responding to initiatives for knowledge transfer and wealth creation;
- ❑ by taking on new responsibilities for social, cultural and economic regeneration.

It is felt that further expansion is most likely in those groups of students who are unwilling or unable to study on campus (mature students, work-based learners, students with special needs, women returners)²⁵. Many HEIs are looking at ICT solutions to meet this trend and also to increase opportunities for collaborative research. Fforwm also points out that changes in ICT even threaten the traditional part-time market in Wales which has to date been relatively stable because of the need of students to access local facilities. *“The part-time market is less tied to Wales delivery than previously in view of changes in technology and other flexible learning techniques.”*

Most respondents feel there is a need for an overall strategy and co-ordinated investment programme to support this. [See the responses from HEW, CBI, Glamorgan, the Open University]. HEW advocates establishing an all-Wales shared network but nothing substantial has yet been decided. As already stated, development costs for IT are considerable (probably too high for any individual institution) but it is important that Wales does not lag behind the rest of the market. Currently, for example, there is no Welsh e-university proposal.

Wales also needs to become more technologically sophisticated to maintain its position in the eyes of its potential students²⁶ – particularly as each new cohort of students is increasingly exposed to high-quality ICT at home and in their leisure activities. They will therefore expect to find this quality of provision continuing into their HE courses. A recent MORI poll on student lifestyles (Feb 19th 2001) provides some support for this statement.

Other perceived challenges include the competition from new providers of HE and the obstacles still to be faced regarding widening access. It is accepted that there are still areas in Wales and rungs on the socio-economic ladder where there is little or no tradition of participation in HE. Strategies must be developed to reach these areas if HE is to be truly inclusive. In addition, there are many students with disabilities whose HE needs must be met. This is another section of the population which is under-represented in HE. The RNIB, Skill and the Disabilities Rights Commission set out a comprehensive list of access issues relating to students with disabilities including the requirements now articulated in legislation.

1.6 Making HE attractive to Welsh students

Although respondents do offer a number of practical suggestions for persuading Welsh students to remain in Wales (see below), the most common response is that creating a quality product, appropriate to a student’s needs will be the best means of attracting students to Welsh HE - including home students. *“A quality degree from a successful department is the best inducement for a graduate to remain in Wales if the job opportunities exist”.*²⁷

²⁵ HEW

²⁶ University of Glamorgan

²⁷

Parity of funding for Welsh HE is seen as a key issue as is equality of treatment over maximum student numbers. As stated earlier, HEFCE's permitted 4% recruitment in student numbers is seen as having an adverse effect on recruitment to Wales. [See the response from HEW]. Funding does not just relate to provision of teaching materials, equipping laboratories and buildings. Adequate resourcing for cultural and recreational facilities is another factor which can affect recruitment.²⁸

Several correspondents point out the many benefits of maintaining a two-way student traffic in and out of Wales. It widens students' horizons and exposes them to different cultures and working practices [Swansea Institute, Cardiff, Bangor]. There is little support for strong marketing of a Welsh brand of HE though it may help to fix the unique identity of Wales in the minds of international students. The initiatives undertaken by the Cardiff Quartet in promoting Cardiff as a city of learning provide examples of good practice in this area.

"Welshness should be seen as an added value to high quality provision."²⁹

"There is a danger of Wales becoming too parochial in its outlook in education."³⁰

"A Welsh system of HE should be able to meet the needs of the Welsh economy and population, without damaging those parts of HE which effectively compete in the international market."³¹

"HE in Wales may develop distinctive Welsh dimensions but these must not be such as to exclude student and researchers from other parts of the UK and elsewhere."³²

The following represent the suggestions for making Wales more attractive to its home students:

- A Welsh HE Marketing Agency [NUS]
- Broadening Welsh language teaching provision [NUS]
- Improving access for under-represented groups [NIACE, Royal College of Nursing]
- Collaboration between schools/FE/HE including compacts [Pontypridd College, ATL, UWCM, Fforwm, Countryside Council]
- Employment opportunities within Wales [NUS]
- Students as mentors/support teachers [Association of Teachers and Lecturers]
- Teachers linked to their local universities [ATL]
- Regional pathways to HE [Trinity, Swansea City Council]
- Focusing efforts on those areas of low participation identified in the Participation Rates for Welsh Students in HE (August 2000) [NATFHE]
- Producing a database of Welsh language resources and an all-Wales directory of courses [WLB]

²⁸ HEW

²⁹ British Pharmacological Society

³⁰

³¹

³² Fforwm

Questions to consider

- 1) Are HE institutions in Wales of sufficient critical size to enable them to compete in a growing global market in both Teaching and Research?**
- 2) If not, can this be achieved by encouraging collaboration along current lines. If so, does this need to be more formalised? Alternatively, should the Assembly encourage a more radical approach involving restructuring of the Welsh HE sector?**
- 3) What are the implications of adopting various models of HE restructuring in terms of funding, quality assurance, institutional autonomy etc?**
- 4) Developing new structures and introducing new technologies are not without their own cost implications. Will funding be made available to support these changes?**
- 5) Can Welsh HE remain competitive without receiving parity of funding and treatment?**

2. Learning and Teaching

2.1 Context

The patterns of HE attendance are changing. Students are dipping in and out of HE as their lifestyles and circumstances alter. They may therefore begin as a full-time student, take a year out and return to study, or take a job and become part-time students. They therefore require a system of transferable credits which can be banked towards qualifications at a future date. Wales has already done much to developing such a system.

This does not mean the traditional campus is dead. School leavers are still likely to opt for full-time, campus-based HE – indeed it is a useful part of the maturation process³³. *“The jury is still out on whether or not ‘face to face’ teaching will whither and die in due course. We suspect that it will not.”*³⁴ However, more 18 year olds are choosing to apply to local campuses because living at home is a cheaper option and this can be a problem for Welsh HE which has a smaller, more dispersed population than England.

Other groups of students may have to study part-time because of work or family commitments. They may do so on campus, at home or in the work place. Work-based students are also increasingly looking for credit for their work-related skills and experience.

Students are also becoming more sophisticated as consumers and are increasingly looking for customised, high quality packages which they can follow at times and in locations that suit their lifestyles. *“Learners of the future ... will demand more direct control over their own education and learning experiences.”*³⁵ *“The cutting edge of much HE will be provision at a price, location and time which the learners themselves dictate.”*³⁶

2.2 General

New technologies are seen as important developments in improving the effectiveness of learning. The benefits to institutions are in maintaining global competitiveness, reaching students who previously would have had difficulties in accessing HE (eg in rural areas, students with disabilities), in facilitating research collaboration and in making more material available through the medium of Welsh.

ICT developments have an equally important role to play on campus in providing additional study support for students eg for revisiting lecture material, providing on-line assistance for assignments etc. The NUS submission, for example, points out that financial constraints force many students to take on part-time jobs. They may therefore need supplementary IT access to lecture material and on-line opportunities to network in order to keep up with their studies.

³³ Glamorgan

³⁴ Swansea Institute

³⁵ Trinity

³⁶ Glamorgan

However, there is also a realisation that these developments can only be effective in conjunction with appropriate and adequate, local support mechanisms and access to facilities and with adequate development funding within an overall framework.

Despite the obvious enthusiasm for new technologies, it is appreciate that not all students will respond well to on-line learning. For example, many non-traditional students need more personalised contact and support. One respondent speaks of the “*tension between using modern delivery methods to make access easy and the need to bring people together for mutual support*”³⁷ “*New methods are best viewed as adding extra value rather than replacing face-to-face interaction.*”³⁸

There is also some tension evident in responses as to the purpose of Higher Education. Many feel it should form a basis for lifetime learning. It should therefore equip students with the skills and motivation to want to continue learning. There is also a need to produce graduates who are highly skilled and can “hit the ground running” when they enter employment. To this end, HEIs need an informed awareness of market demand³⁹ and close contact with local and national employers. However, these graduates equally need to have transferable skills⁴⁰ which will enable them to adapt to the changing needs of their professions or indeed to change professions. Finally, some respondents express concern about linking Higher Education too closely to the changing and somewhat capricious demands of market forces⁴¹.

2.3 New approaches to Learning & Teaching

ICT is seen as a key element for the reasons stated above. There is a realisation that Wales must aspire to be at the forefront of e-learning developments. The University of Glamorgan notes that the Ufi has already discovered that surprisingly few UK universities can produce high quality on-screen teaching materials.

However, many respondents [Glamorgan, NATFHE, UWCM etc] also comment that the increased use of ICT will not necessarily be a cheap option because—

- ✓ there are significant development costs;
- ✓ there is a need to provide facilities in communities so that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are not disadvantaged;
- ✓ there is a need for extensive support mechanisms⁴² (both technical and tutorial/pastoral);
- ✓ there are significant staffing costs (updating of skills; 24 hour support etc).

There is also a recognition that distance/flexible learning will require special attention in terms of quality assurance and robust audit trails.

Staff development is seen as crucial to the success of any new approaches [HEW, UACE Cymru, WNB, UKCoSA, WCMD etc]. Almost every HEI submission makes reference to this. Suggestions include staff exchanges to facilitate exposure to new systems; and ensuring that staff have the knowledge and skills required to make best use of new technology. It is not simply a matter of putting traditional material on the

³⁷

³⁸ UWCN

³⁹ CBI

⁴⁰ Llandrillo

⁴¹

⁴² NIACE

Web – new approaches and techniques will have to be learned to help staff provide appropriate and attractive material. Good management of technological change is required equally for administrative staff who have to adapt to using complex new systems.⁴³

The use of ICT must be linked to learning outcomes and not just for its own sake. The National Museums & Galleries of Wales' submission comments *"the embedding of ICT into course delivery is vital, and can encourage greater student-led learning, but emphasis must be based upon learning outcomes."* ICT skills should be of the higher order skills congruent with the notion of gradueness⁴⁴. Trinity College, Carmarthen highlight the fact that "learner empowerment" is the crucial issue in the use of new technology not the technology itself.

Given the costs involved in developing distance learning materials, many feel Wales should develop a coordinated and more centralised strategic approach – an All Wales 'shared learning network' was proposed by several respondents [HEW, OU, UWCM, UWIC etc]. "There is a danger, too, of unnecessary duplication and unsatisfactory quality if all institutions seek to invest their modest resources in open and distance learning programmes."⁴⁵ Cardiff University feel that once a network has been developed, it should then be left to individual institutions to develop their materials but others see more benefit from continued collaboration.

ICT is also seen as facilitating collaboration in both teaching and research.⁴⁶

There is support for the Institute of Learning and Teaching. The NUS suggest that compulsory membership should be phased in. Other suggestions for learning and teaching developments include:

- ❑ Community Learning Centres⁴⁷. These can serve a dual purpose of supporting off-campus study and maintaining a visible presence for HE in areas where there is not a culture of HE participation.
- ❑ Mentoring networks in communities and making use of existing community organisations and pressure groups.⁴⁸
- ❑ An all-Wales Staff Development forum for HE in Wales⁴⁹.
- ❑ Joint staff development for HE and FE, particularly as the latter has experience in relating to new learners and previously excluded groups⁵⁰

2.4 Global competitiveness

There is a realisation that many new players are entering the HE market including consortia linked with the media, private for-profit organisations, in-company "universities".

⁴³ AUT

⁴⁴ WNB for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

⁴⁵ OU

⁴⁶ Bangor

⁴⁷ NUS

⁴⁸ AUT

⁴⁹ FEDA Cymru; NUS

⁵⁰

In order to be competitive, HE in Wales must maintain the quality of its provision; and the fitness for purpose of its course content and methods of delivery. This is linked with the need to attract and retain good research/teaching staff and to the provision of good facilities. Underfunding in the past has not helped HEIs to maintain the standard of their estate or their research facilities. There are also concerns about the high costs of current quality assurance mechanisms diverting resources from core activities.

If Wales is to compete in the global market, however, it needs to achieve critical mass in both teaching and research in order to compete with international consortia or even with large individual institutions. The scale of investment needed to become a major player cannot be achieved by small, inward-looking institutions.

2.5 Responding to market for lifelong, distance and flexible learning

There is a general feeling that HE in Wales has responded well to widening access initiatives. However, institutions are aware that work still needs to be done to create an inclusive environment, particularly in relation to attracting the very lowest socio-economic groups.

Widening access initiatives are expensive, requiring the resourcing of additional support mechanisms in order to improve student retention. NEWI points out *“Widening access does not imply opening doors to everyone irrespective of their stage of ability. To do so is to provide heartache for individuals who are subsequently failed or referred in their studies.”* Such students need support both to help them attain the appropriate entry qualifications and to continue in their studies.

Suggestions include:

- ❑ A seamless credit system - *“a roll on, roll off lifelong learning system”* ⁵¹
- ❑ Expansion of part-time/flexible delivery and provision of appropriate support facilities
- ❑ Employer support for lifelong learning of staff should be encouraged and the benefits made clear to them
- ❑ Distance learning needs robust support mechanisms eg on-line mentoring, internet conferencing
- ❑ Lifelong learning students need to acquire information/research skills to get full benefit
- ❑ Flexible entry routes to HE
- ❑ Flexible programmes to fit in with changing work commitments
- ❑ Need to develop more expertise in accrediting and valuing work-based learning

HE has also to adapt to providing lifelong learning for students of all ages and capabilities. FEDA points out that the culture of learning is changing. There is *“a new work ethic incorporating continuing professional development, a belief that education does not stop at age 16 and that education should not be restricted solely to formal learning.”* *“Lifelong learning at HE level cannot be delivered via a traditional full-time degree.”*⁵²

2.6 Vocationally relevant programmes

There is a feeling from some respondents that HE needs to strengthen its links with employers to ensure that courses are relevant, up-to-date and reflect market demand. These collaborations could include resource sharing (personnel, data, facilities), job shadowing and more involvement with live projects. There is also a general acceptance of the need for curricula to include transferable skills⁵³.

However, others argue the case for education for its own sake and say it should not regard preparing people for work or the changing needs of national/international economies as its primary role. *“Education is a valuable commodity in its own right”*⁵⁴; *“Funding and other policies for higher education should give proper weight to the needs of the individual, alongside those of the economy, the future labour market and the nation in general”*⁵⁵

The CBI suggested a targeted approach to funding to develop teaching in shortage subject areas. It sees the immediate skills deficit as people with intermediate technical and employable skills.

The following comments were also made:

- ❑ There is a need for a formal strategy for the economic development of Wales to include vocationally relevant programmes *“being a nation of call centres is not the route to economic development”*.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Llandrillo

⁵²

⁵³ National Museums & Galleries of Wales

⁵⁴

⁵⁵

⁵⁶

- ❑ There is a need for foreign language competence as the workplace is becoming more globalised⁵⁷
- ❑ *“More emphasis on Employer/NTO consortia to ensure our graduates can walk into the world of work.”*⁵⁸
- ❑ Need to establish sectoral planning bodies to identify skill needs and particular sectoral requirements for future training.⁵⁹
- ❑ *“The real challenge for HE is to develop both the specific skills and knowledge required and the wider underpinning transferable skills.”*⁶⁰
- ❑ *“A strong Welsh, vocationally orientated university is needed to compete with larger English universities.”*⁶¹

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Questions to be considered

- 1) **Can Wales afford to neglect ICT opportunities, given what is happening world-wide?**
- 2) **Knowing the scale of investment needed, can Wales develop ICT on an all-Wales basis rather than this being left to ad hoc development by individual institutions?**
- 3) **Can we afford to rely simply on collaboration (which has produced minimal results so far) to provide a strong, Welsh, vocationally-led university to compete with the large UK universities or indeed with the global market?**
- 4) **If we build a strong vocational hub, how can we best ensure that other institutions, particularly FE colleges are included in this development?**
- 5) **How can greater employer/academia interaction be encouraged and what form should it take?**
- 6) **To what extent should lifelong learning be seen as a benefit in its own right rather than linked to the changing national and/or local labour markets?**
- 7) **How can HE institutions improve their retention rates whilst pursuing widening access initiatives (In recent evidence to House of Commons education committee, drop out costs to taxpayer were estimated at £200m a year in the UK)?**

3. Economic, Social and Cultural Regeneration

⁵⁷

⁵⁸

⁵⁹

⁶⁰ FEDA

⁶¹

3.1 Context

Higher Education in Wales is a significant factor in the economy of Wales. HE in Wales is worth over £1 billion in income and produces indirectly/directly over 23,000 jobs⁶². *“Higher Education acts as both a resource and a stimulus for the economy.”*⁶³ *“The Welsh Higher Education sector is a very substantial industry in Wales in its own right and brings all the benefits of a big internationally competitive business to Wales.”*⁶⁴

In addition, HEIs contribute to the economy through

- Research
- Consultancy
- Teaching company schemes
- Spin-off companies and technology transfer
- Production of a skilled workforce
- Science parks
- Representation on regional fora for economic development

HE also has a significant local role. HE institutions in many parts of Wales are the major local employer. For example, Aberystwyth University accounts for 10% of the economy in Ceredigion. They have close links with local employers and are therefore in tune with the immediate needs of local industry. This local interaction is one reason that many institutions feel a local HE presence must be retained even if the HEIs in the area are relatively small organisations.

There is a realisation that HE must not, however, be too parochial in its approach and that by serving the needs of the global economy, the needs of particular regions of Wales can also be met. NEWI for example points out that in a survey of local businesses over 40% are multi-national. The presence of HEIs in particular regions in Wales has been crucial in attracting international companies such as LG, International Rectifiers to set up in Wales.

Attracting students into Wales, particularly international students, is another factor in contributing to the economy of Wales. If the UK as a whole meets the ambitious targets the government has set in this respect, a substantial proportion of the additional 50,000 overseas students will come to Wales. The British Council suggests a need therefore to draw up a seriously researched and costed business plan for recruit overseas students (the British Council have been invited to expand on this).

Higher Education’s contribution to the National Assembly’s strategy for Wales is not limited to the role it plays in the economy. It contributes to:

- Providing better opportunities for learning
- Better health and well-being
- Better quality of life

HEIs are often the cultural focus for their region, providing theatres, art galleries, concert halls, library facilities, sporting facilities; conference facilities, public lecture series etc. In addition they play a major part in providing community programmes and

⁶² The Impact of the Higher Education Sector on the Welsh Economy, HEW, 1997

⁶³ University of Wales

⁶⁴ HEW

continuing education. The contribution made to enhancing the health and well-being of the population is substantial. This is effected through the education and training of medical staff, research – HE produces most of the research for the NHS – health education programmes etc. Last but not least, HE is the stimulus in many areas for promoting bilingualism.

3.2 General

In all the submissions from HEIs, it is evident that they recognise they have an important role to play in social and economic regeneration . However, it is generally felt that there is a need for coherent and adequate funding for this activity as a separate stream to protect the core funding for teaching and research. The AUT for example points out that SMEs may find it difficult to provide the level of funding (for consultancy or knowledge transfer) that larger enterprises can afford but this shortfall cannot be provided by HEIs.

NIACE advocates the building of credible relationships with local communities so that they have ownership of what is provided for them.

3.3 How to demonstrate the economic benefits HE brings to Wales

HEIs themselves are aware of the contribution they make to the economy but feel that the significance of this is not fully appreciated by the general population.

Suggestions for heightening this awareness include:

- ❑ Developing impact indicators to record the economic effects of attracting students and research into Wales⁶⁵
- ❑ Report economic benefits and achievements annually to NAFW and HEFCW⁶⁶
- ❑ Build a competitive, highly skilled workforce to attract foreign investment⁶⁷
- ❑ Increase overseas recruitment and develop studies to show the importance of the contribution overseas students make to the Welsh economy
- ❑ Publish statistics showing the contribution graduates make to the economy
- ❑ Developing tracking systems for graduates from Welsh HEIs to provide information on returns from educational investment⁶⁸
- ❑ Convince employers of the benefits in innovation and competitiveness they can achieve by employing graduates⁶⁹
- ❑ More detailed analysis of the economic impact of HEIs on their local economies⁷⁰

3.4 Responding effectively to diverse needs of public, private and voluntary sectors

HEW's submission lists the many ways that HEIs are already responding to the needs of the local economy. These include the help given to SMEs via such schemes as the HELP Wales initiative in which 9 HEIs are providing consultancy services worth almost £3 million to SMEs. HEIs have become heavily involved in the provision of Training and Consultancy Services. The number of consultancies has more than doubled between 1994 and 1999.

⁶⁵ HEW

⁶⁶ Fforwm

⁶⁷ London Mathematical Society

⁶⁸ HEW

⁶⁹ Llandrillo

⁷⁰ UACE Cymru

The WDA's centres of expertise located in HEIs help businesses become aware of the expertise and facilities available to them. Teaching Company Schemes which employ HE graduates as researchers in local industrial companies have been very successful. The University of Glamorgan was the top UK university in 1998-99 in the TCS. Bangor was in the top ten UK universities for three successive years. The investment in TCS projects in Wales was £6.9 million in 1998/99 and it is estimated this will generate an additional £129 million to the Welsh economy and created 348 jobs.

Welsh institutions have been successful in gaining substantial seedcorn funding from the University Challenge Seed Fund. Cardiff University and UWCM have been awarded £3million and Abertyswyth (with the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research) has received £1 million.

HEW's submission also details the enormous contribution made by HE in Wales to the NHS.

Other comments/suggestions include:

- Strengthening the regional position by better funding for part-time Higher Education⁷¹
- Working even more closely with SMEs but it is noted that HEIs cannot subsidise SMEs who may find it difficult to provide the level of overheads that larger organisations are able to bring
- Strengthening and reviewing the links between HE and public/private sectors and even more so with voluntary sector
- *"The sector's ability to look into future and develop new and emerging areas is crucial"*
- The judicious use of ICT can mean courses can be adapted to suit the needs of different sector groups.⁷²
- *"A defined framework of academic and industrial collaboration"*⁷³

There is some concern that there is proliferation of overlapping initiatives and that some overall view needs to be taken. UWCM speaks of a need for *"coherent strategic approaches probably based on a network of HEI collaboration"* and Fforwm refers to a need for closer partnerships between HE and FE to avoid having separate and potentially competing initiatives. The NUS feels that the role of the Community Consortia for Education and Training as stakeholders in HE should be increased to ensure further collaboration between HE institutions and the wider community.

NIACE sees the biggest challenge is *"to engage with local communities and the voluntary sector in ways that reassess the balance of perceived power between institutions and individuals/communities"*.

FEDA points out that one in three people in Wales are involved in voluntary work. The voluntary sector provides a wide range of opportunities for individuals to develop personally. HE should strengthen its links to the voluntary sector by working closely with Dysgu Cymru, NIACE's new initiative.

3.5 Widening Access

⁷¹ UWCN

⁷² OU

⁷³ Aberystwyth

Most respondents feel that the barriers to access to Higher Education are well known and that the sector needs to concentrate now on effective action. It is widely acknowledged that Welsh HE has performed well in responding to widening access initiatives but that the sector must continue to push ahead with these activities. There is still not enough representation in HE from the lower socio-economic groups and there are still areas of Wales where young people in particular are not being attracted into HE.

Most respondents feel the situation has been made more difficult because of changes in student funding. Young people from poorer families do not want to take on student loans and huge debts. The irony is that many of these potential students would not have to pay fees and there is a need therefore for more publicity and information to explain what the commitment would be. There is evidence (from the Rowntree report) to suggest that students from poorer backgrounds choose shorter courses; ones leading to lower qualifications; a limited range of subjects (ie ones they see as more likely to lead to employment) and that they avoid the more prestigious institutions. This is a hidden form of exclusion.

HEIs make a strong case that widening access activities are costly. Not only do institutions have to resource special activities for recruiting students from non-traditional backgrounds but these students also require more support in order to keep them in the sector. The NUS submission draws attention to the fact that drop-out rates are higher in those Welsh HEIs that attract students from a wider socio-economic base. Short-term funding for widening access activities though welcome, does not help HEIs plan strategically. The policy of providing funding against institutions' plans is therefore seen as a step forward⁷⁴.

Providing support for non-traditional students is not just a matter of preserving good retention rates. Consideration should be given to the consequences of dropping out on these less confident students – *"It is vitally important that students who may have low levels of confidence are not subjected to a situation in which they may experience failure."*⁷⁵ Collaboration with the FE sector is seen as crucial in encouraging progression into HE and in adapting their supportive techniques for non-traditional into HE.

Suggestions for further action on widening access include:

- Extending HE into local communities through FE links or specialist providers⁷⁶
- Market HE as vocational pathways ie HNC/HND and foundation degrees provide stepping stones⁷⁷
- Providing role models from **all** sectors of society
- Partnerships with schools, colleges, CCETs etc (eg passport schemes, bursaries and sponsorship for the disadvantaged)
- Good access courses especially in technical subjects
- Good practice in non-accredited learning eg taster sessions, study skills workshops, weekend schools⁷⁸
- Maximising the use of local learning centres⁷⁹
- Weighted funding for students from socially deprived areas⁸⁰ or for students with specific learning disadvantages

⁷⁴ Cardiff

⁷⁵ UACE

⁷⁶ Coleg Harlech

⁷⁷ Coleg Sirgar

⁷⁸ NIACE

⁷⁹ NIACE

- ❑ Adequate funding for modules to encourage growth of part-time provision⁸¹
- ❑ A project on the lines of England's 'Partnerships for Progression Scheme' in which students are trained to mentor 13-16 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds⁸²
- ❑ Specially targetted schemes such as "Openings"⁸³
- ❑ Bursaries for certain groups of student eg mature students, those on low incomes, those with dependents, students with disabilities and those from economically deprived communities⁸⁴

Good practice cited by HEIs includes school compacts, summer schools/universities, teachers affiliated to local universities, taster sessions, mentoring.

An important aspect of widening access is opening HE to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Students with disabilities are currently under-represented in HE. In a recent survey, only 3.8% of first year students studying at Welsh institutions are known to have a disability compared with an estimate of 18% in secondary schools.⁸⁵ Many of the comments above relating to funding, access via local centres etc apply equally well to this group of students. In addition, HEIs have to comply with recently introduced legislation which has substantial resource implications. The needs of this group of students are eloquently set out in the submissions from the Disability Rights Commission,

They include the need for specialist equipment, equipping buildings for physical access, provision of volunteer note takers for deaf students and for helpers for students with mobility problems. Disabled students may need more information than other students before they are able to select a course.⁸⁶ There is also the need for staff development to ensure lecturing staff appreciate the problems faced by students with disabilities and the need for providing material in accessible formats. Good practice includes the prior assessment of the needs of students with disabilities either through the Student Services departments or specialist access centres such as the one at Bangor.

3.6 HEIs as local, regional and national cultural centres

The National Assembly's recent review of arts and culture recognised that "Culture is at the heart of our national enterprise". Welsh HEIs are acutely conscious of their contribution to this cultural life. HEW lists the contribution made by its members. These include the Welsh College of Music and Drama as Wales' national conservatoire; the Film School at UWCN; the Welsh language departments in Bangor and Aberystwyth; the internationally acclaimed stained glass work at Swansea Institute; arts, drama and media courses at several institutions; the Community University of the Valleys initiative involving Glamorgan, UWCN, Swansea and the OU; and the music departments in Cardiff and Bangor.

Institutions are concerned that, whilst they are aware of the importance of continuing these activities – particularly in rural areas – they cannot be expected to do so from the traditional HE budget. In recognising this contribution to cultural enrichment

⁸⁰ NUS

⁸¹ Llandrillo

⁸² NUS

⁸³ OU

⁸⁴ AUT

⁸⁵ Disability Rights Commission

⁸⁶ Skill

“HEW would propose that funding and other policies for higher education should give proper weight to the needs of the individual, alongside those of the economy, the future labour market and the nation in general”.

Suggestions/comments also include:

- ❑ The development of more non-accredited courses
- ❑ HEIs being members of the relevant CCET
- ❑ Looking at ways European countries encourage informed discussion on scientific/technical matters in the population at large
- ❑ HE as a catalyst for integrated cultural networks
- ❑ *“HE should be consider the economic benefits it creates alongside potential social and environmental benefits”.*⁸⁷

3.5 Contributing to bilingual capacity

“The Welsh language is the most obvious feature which distinguishes Welsh higher education from that in the rest of the UK.”

HE makes a major cultural contribution in promoting the Welsh language by offering degree courses in Welsh; providing opportunities for adult learners; library and museum provision; through teacher training; by maintaining departments of Welsh and Welsh history; by providing linguistic in-service training for companies and professions. Although the majority of this activity is concentrated on a few institutions including Bangor, Aberystwyth and Trinity, all HEIs have to comply with the requirements of the Welsh Language Act and, once again, this has resource implications.

The University of Wales promotes the Welsh language through its Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies; the Board of Celtic Studies and the University of Wales Press. It has, through its Board for Welsh Medium Teaching, funded a post to develop Welsh Medium teaching provision. The new Development Officer will establish a new framework for collaborating and co-ordinating academic provision through the medium of Welsh. In addition **all** Welsh HEIs and HEFCW are funding a Unit to “seek more focussed, effective and dynamic delivery of Welsh-medium higher education provision”.

Information and communications technology is seen as providing opportunities for extending Welsh Medium provision – for example, through products such as the online dictionary “Cysgair” and the spell-checker “Cysill”. This will, of course, have resource implications as will Bangor’s suggestion of providing simultaneous translation in committees and producing bilingual documentation and publicity material.

Further suggestions include :

- ❑ Work more closely with Welsh-medium schools/colleges⁸⁸
- ❑ Use existing partnerships eg Welsh for Adults⁸⁹
- ❑ Enhanced funding for Welsh Medium assessment.
- ❑ Working in partnership with the media, developing a bilingual study channel.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Environment Agency Wales

⁸⁸ Fforwm

⁸⁹ Fforwm

⁹⁰ Countryside Council for Wales

Questions to consider

- 1) How can the impact of HE on the Welsh economy best be assessed and publicised?**
- 2) Can a third income stream be provided to ensure core teaching and research activities are not adversely affected?**
- 3) How can a balance be struck between HEIs responding to specific local needs and cooperating (with other HEIs and public/voluntary sectors) on initiatives to avoid wasteful duplication?**
- 4) Should funding be mission-sensitive eg widening access requires premium funding?**
- 5) How can HE further address the problems of social exclusion?**
- 6) How can HE Wales extend access to Welsh medium provision without duplication of courses and bearing in mind the sector's limited resources?**
- 7) Can long-term funding be made available for access and other initiatives to permit a more strategic approach?**

4. Research

4.1 Context

HEIs in Wales have to compete for research funding on a national and international basis. Welsh HEIs are understandably proud of their improved performance in the the Research Assessment Exercises of 1992 and 1996 – improvements both in absolute terms and relative to the performance in the rest of the UK. The sector is looking to further enhance this performance in the current round of assessment.

However, the Welsh research community only attracts 3% of Research Council Funding. This should be at least 5% given its size. The issues which concern HEIs in connection with research are funding, the size of research units/research-led institutions and the need for Wales to have a world-class research reputation. The latter view is strongly endorsed by the WDA - *“a world-class, international research base is vital if Wales is to compete in the knowledge driven industry.”*

4.2 General

The reason for Wales underperforming in attracting research grants is firmly laid, by HEW, at the door of underfunding. Because of general underfunding, Welsh HEIs have poorer student-staff ratios than their counterparts in the UK and this limits the time they can allocate to scholarly activity. Another factor is their success in widening access initiatives. Wales has a greater percentage of students from under-represented groups. As a consequence staff have to devote a greater amount of time to supporting these students.

Adequate and appropriate funding is essential to building a successful research community. Good research facilities are the key to attracting and retaining good researchers who, of course, can pick and choose posts in an international market. Salaries too must be competitive. *“Wales will not attract or retain high-quality researchers if it even contemplates being content with ‘making the best use of limited resources’.”*⁹¹

Research is an area where collaboration between different HEIs or between HEIs and industry can be very valuable. ICT developments facilitate such collaboration. The Welsh Development Agency suggests *“There could be more cooperation .. to create a critical mass of research excellence in particular fields (which) would in turn make best use of limited resources.”*

Several HEIs comment, however, that current funding mechanisms favour competition rather than collaboration though the recently-introduced ability to put in joint RAE submissions is welcomed. UWCM, in its submission, points to the danger of undermining research funding by allowing a proliferation of centres with a similar research mission within Wales. UWCM stresses, for example, its **all-Wales** role and is opposed to the development of a second medical school in Swansea. This is also the rationale behind its reluctance to too close a rapprochement with Cardiff University as it does not wish to be seen as having a role that is limited to the South Wales area.

⁹¹ Aberystwyth

The value of all research streams is acknowledged. Indeed, it is felt that it is artificial to try to separate them. *“To think in terms of an arbitrary and inflexible balance between basic, strategic and applied research may be the enemy of creativity, innovation and excellence in basic research in particular.” “Know-how and IPR come principally from an environment of active research”.*

Many respondents want to see more funding for applied research. *“Future funding policy for research in HE needs to place more equal emphasis on basic, strategic and applied research. Implicit in this is the need to place greater value than at present on the latter two forms of activity.”*⁹²

It is recognised that there has to be in research funding and this naturally favours institutions with an established research base. However, there is also a need to balance support for excellence in research with the need to provide scope for embryonic units or talented individuals to develop. Establishing Centres of Research Excellence is favoured by many respondents [Glamorgan, HEW, NEWI, etc] HEFCW expresses concern about the financial polarisation between institutions as a result of the RAE exercise.

HEIs feel that, whilst there is a need to concentrate the bulk of research in centres of excellence, no HEI in Wales must be seen as teaching only. Good quality scholarship is essential to an understanding of a particular discipline. *“The predominant differentiation between research-led institutions ... and teaching institutions is outdated and potentially harmful to the broader HE agenda in Wales.”*⁹³ Teaching and Research are mutually supportive. Students from departments with “cutting edge” research are likely to graduate as leaders of their field.⁹⁴

*“All HE staff must therefore have the time and opportunity to engage in research but research defined in the broadest sense to embrace scholarship, applied as well as pure research and the dissemination of knowledge to the benefit of business, policy makers, the public and non-profit sectors.”*⁹⁵

4.3 Barriers to developing a robust, high quality research base

The relatively small size of Welsh research establishments is seen as a problem. *“The strength in depth of real excellence in research even within the traditional universities in Wales does not compare with major institutions in England or Scotland.”*⁹⁶ Although size is no guarantee of quality and good work is being carried out in some of the smaller HEIs, there is a general feeling that research needs to achieve a critical mass in order to really make an impact. *“It needs a much greater critical mass not only in basic research of international standing but also in the kinds of applied, developmental work which underpins local business”.* Small research units are not on the whole viable. The ability to put in joint submissions in the current RAE exercise is welcomed. The point is made several times about changing funding mechanisms to make them more conducive to collaboration.

There is a need for more equitably distributed research funding – the current system increases *“the financial polarisation between institutions.”* This is seen particularly in the gap between old and new institutions - pre-1992 institutions receive 96% of

⁹² UWIC

⁹³ UWCN

⁹⁴ NUS

⁹⁵ Glamorgan

⁹⁶ Glamorgan

research funding. NATFHE suggested that one way of encouraging participation from the new universities would be to make it a requirement that collaborative arrangements are made to include post-92 institutions through shadowing, mentoring or joint seminars.

A concern was expressed by the AUT in relation to research contracts, the majority of which are fixed-term. This does not encourage long-term planning or stability of research teams. In addition, the NUS argue for a code of practice to ensure better training and support for postgraduates employed as casual teachers, demonstrators etc.

Comments in this section include:

- ❑ “Few important decisions are made in industry in Wales”.
- ❑ *“Postgraduate students with teaching roles require good quality professional development”* – the NUS suggests introducing a code of practice.
- ❑ Develop a seedcorn funding stream for departments with previously low RAE ratings which is at least 10% of the total amount provided by the funding councils.
- ❑ Underfunding means poor buildings and laboratory infrastructure.
- ❑ Regional support for research meetings to attract visitors to Wales and raise its profile in the international research community (Spain and Germany provide this type of support)
- ❑ A local added value element in any research projects that bring direct benefit to the local economy and community
- ❑ *“On a per capita basis, England spends twice as much on R & D (in health related research) as Wales does.”*⁹⁷

4.4 Differentiation of research missions

Differentiation of mission and building on an institution’s strengths are seen as desirable though some respondents feel a mixed and balanced research portfolio is more realistic. *“A balance (should) be struck between concentration and selectivity and the maintenance of a level of diversity.”*⁹⁸ *“There must be a differentiation of research missions.. and the right balance between basic, strategic and applied research must be decided by institutions themselves in the context of their individual strengths.”*⁹⁹

HEW urges the Committee not to think too narrowly. *“Much of Welsh HEIs contribution to Welsh industry and commerce through applied research is often made by departments that are not in receipt of Research Council funding. Conversely HEIs with expertise in pure research ... are able to react to the strategic research needs of government”*.

Comments/suggestions include:

- ❑ *“Excellence in research should be supported wherever it is found.”*¹⁰⁰
- ❑ There is a need for targeted resources
- ❑ We should build on institutions’ strengths
- ❑ *“Competition drives quality up and pushes forward innovation.”*¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ UWCM

⁹⁸ BBSRC

⁹⁹ Cardiff

¹⁰⁰ HEW

- ❑ More support for applied research
- ❑ Applied research requires different skills to basic research
- ❑ Pure research is often the catalyst for attracting knowledge-based companies
- ❑ Seedcorn funding to develop new areas was held to be important. *“A careful balance must be struck between promoting excellence and developing potential.”*
- ❑ Current funding mechanisms do not take account of the different resources needed for different types of research.¹⁰²

4.5 Commercialisation of research activity

Institutions agree on the need for commercialisation of research activity. Much has already been achieved. HEW points to the excellent partnership of HEIs and the WDA over the years in establishing technology parks, incubator units and an industrial nursery. However, more graduates need to be encouraged to commercialise their research through entrepreneurial activity for the benefit of Wales. Welsh HEIs, with their close links with industry at both local and national level, are in a good position to be able to assess what the market is looking for in terms of research outcomes.

There is a need for HEIs to be supported in the commercialisation of their activities. For example, they may need guidance on patents and how to safeguard intellectual property rights. There will also be risk attached to commercial activities and the sector needs advice/assistance in carrying out risk analysis and commercial evaluation. One suggestion was for a central agency to play such a role – it was felt it might have more muscle when dealing with bankers, developers etc. There is a strong feeling that the current regimes of accountability may encourage risk avoidance and stifle commercial developments.

Other points made in submissions include:

- ❑ A need to demonstrate benefits of research to community at large
- ❑ Research in some disciplines does not contribute directly to wealth creation but is equally valuable *“It is important to appreciate the value of high quality research in both cultural and scientific contexts as well as in commercial contexts.”*¹⁰³
- ❑ The definition of commercial activity should be extended to include the interaction of HE with voluntary and not-for-profit bodies and with the unitary authorities.
- ❑ *“There has been a plethora of various initiatives (in the commercialisation of research)... and it is essential that there is appropriate coordination of the schemes in order to avoid duplication or conflict with existing, successful activities.”*¹⁰⁴

Questions to consider

- 1) Can world class research be achieved if research activities remain dispersed in relatively small and autonomous universities?**
- 2) Do current funding mechanisms best serve the needs of building a strong research base?**
- 3) How can emerging areas of research best be encouraged and nurtured?**

¹⁰¹ Royal College of Nursing

¹⁰² UWCM

¹⁰³ Swansea

¹⁰⁴ Cardiff

4) How can applied research allied to wealth creation be promoted/expanded without detracting from basic research funding streams?

5. Funding

5.1 Context

HE has made efficiency gains of 35% over the last two years and student numbers have been greatly expanded without a corresponding increase in funding. The recent funding increases announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review have naturally been welcomed - though the final picture for Wales was not made clear at the same time as for England. However, there is a long way to go before a level playing field is reached or the unit of resource per student can be restored.

In addition, compliance with legislation - such as that relating to Welsh language provision or the rights of disabled students - and the requirements of accountability - such as the QAA codes of practice or subject reviews – all require resourcing from the HE budget.

In addition, changes to student funding, in terms of the introduction of tuition fees paid by students and the abolition of the maintenance grant, are having an effect on HE. Although the National Assembly for Wales has announced a review into student funding separate from the current review, the issue cannot be totally ignored by the scope of this review because of the effects on enrolment and retention rates.

Inequities in funding are of particular concern whether they apply to student funding or to funding in general.

5.2 General

The most frequently raised concern was that Welsh HE is underfunded compared with England and even more so with Scotland (see page 3). Underfunding affects the ability to recruit and retain both students and staff; and constrains the sector's ability to contribute to the economic prosperity, culture, health and social development of Wales.

The University of Wales lists the effects of successive years of cutback – a declining unit of resource, a backlog maintenance problem, lack of capital investment and the adverse effects on staff morale of inadequate pay.

There are several features of HE in Wales which make it more expensive to operate than its counterparts in the rest of the UK. These include the geography of Wales, bilingualism, the population spread and the transport infrastructure. Some of these factors affect the students' ability to access HE and staff's ability to network with their peers in the rest of the UK and abroad.

Efficiency gains (35% between 1989/90 and 1998/99) cannot be sustained without compromising quality. With increasing competition in HE, potential students will vote with their feet if quality is not maintained. *“The provision of high quality service in HE and a declining unit of resource are mutually exclusive.”*¹⁰⁵ Bangor comments that the UK has one of the lowest figures for funding per student in the OECD and that funding per student has reduced by 50% in real terms since 1980.

¹⁰⁵ IChemE

Respondents feel that funding for initiatives such as widening access or undertaking community regeneration should not be at the expense of the core activities of teaching and research nor should the cost of accountability divert resources away from students. As a result of the funding changes, many HEIs find it expensive and time-consuming to be involved in the collection of student fees and debt recovery. It is also the case that, with the number of small institutions in Wales competing for students, too many resources are expended on promoting one against the other in the internal market.

There is strong feeling from the majority of respondents that competition for funding is often felt to be counter-productive as it is not mission-sensitive and forces institutions into conformity or to apply for funding that may be of limited benefit financially or strategically. HEFCW's use of formula allocations against agreed action plans is cited as good practice as is the ability to put forward joint submissions to the RAE. However, the extent to which institutions are availing themselves of the latter opportunity needs to be explored.

Respondents accept that resources are not infinite but fear that underfunding can have serious effect on the ability to deliver a quality product. For example, underfunding can seriously damage the human resource element of HE. *"If Welsh institutions seem less attractive – perceived or otherwise – than their English or Scottish counterparts and international competitors in terms of autonomy, governance or funding, academics will 'vote with their feet' and Welsh higher education will lose a vital resource."*

Ambitious targets have been set by the Government for attracting international students who pay full fees. However, in a highly competitive market, these students will also be deterred by inadequate facilities and any perceived lowering of quality. *"Income from international student fees must not be taken for granted: recruitment of international students relies more than any other factor on satisfied customers."*¹⁰⁶

5.3 How to ensure a high quality service within budget

Respondents feel that Welsh HE should be funded at same level as its UK competitors. In particular parallels are drawn with Scotland as having a similar profile to Welsh HE in that there is a large rural population, scattered over a diverse area. Lack of parity in funding reduces Wales' effectiveness in world markets. *"Wales must be able to compete within the UK and global markets."*¹⁰⁷

It is felt that short-term funding for specific initiatives, though welcome, do not encourage a strategic approach and there is strong support [eg from organisations such as the National Museums & Galleries of Wales; the WNB for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting; NATFHE; NIACE as well as from individual HEIs] for a longer-term cycle of funding.

Underfunding affects many areas of HE. Poor estates and poor facilities deter staff and students. Efficiency gains lead to high staff student ratios with a consequent reduction in the time staff can devote to recruitment, pastoral support and scholarship. Solutions such as increased use of ICT or the restructuring of HE are not a low-cost option because of their initial costs.

¹⁰⁶ UKCOSA

¹⁰⁷ AUT

Collaboration, particularly in the provision of support services or in the harmonisation of regulatory and quality assurance mechanisms, is seen as one way of cutting costs whilst maintaining provision. *“The affordability of HE in Wales will be assisted by the avoidance of unnecessary duplication – in a small sector like that in Wales there is some scope to map needs and markets and to collaborate to meet those needs.”*¹⁰⁸

However, the Cardiff Quartet points out that collaborative ventures need time and resources to get them up and running. Also, managers tend to deploy their limited resources on activities of local concern rather than on collaborative issues over which they feel they have limited control. UWCM cites HEFCE’s Restructuring and Collaboration Fund as a useful template for encouraging collaboration and effecting change.

As has already been stated in connection with research, the sector feels competitive bidding for funding can be counter-productive and wasteful of time and resources. There is some support for a more directed programme of funding that is mission-sensitive and builds on the strengths of the various institutions.¹⁰⁹ UWCM feels there is a need for a balance in funding to provide both core funding and initiative funding through formula.

In particular, the ability to attract and retain good quality staff is seen as crucial to the maintenance of the excellence of Welsh HE. Adequate funding is therefore required for salaries, staff development, and infrastructure. HEW states that nearly all institutions are experiencing recruitment problems in at least one subject area. It calculates that Welsh higher education needs an investment of £25.5 million over the next three years to rectify the worsening staff recruitment and retention problems.

The CBI cites the pros and cons of various funding models for consideration including top up fees, endowment models, funding by institutional mission, individual learning accounts. Various solutions to the funding problems are suggested but one point on which all agree is that this issue is fundamental and needs to be faced as a matter of urgency.

The Funding Council sums up the requirements for funding as:

- ❑ A commitment by the National Assembly to maintain the unit of resource at the level of England with the eventual aim of catching up to the Scottish level
- ❑ A willingness by the National Assembly to meet reasonable restructuring costs
- ❑ A willingness to develop a recurrent, core funding stream for third mission activities.

5.4 Financial Hardship

The NUS feels that many students were missing out on the educational contact beyond the lecture theatre because of the necessity to hold down part-time jobs in addition to study. Concerns are expressed that this affects students’ abilities to keep up with their studies and therefore leads to higher drop-out rates. Such evidence has recently been put to the House of Commons committee looking at retention rates.

¹⁰⁸ OU

¹⁰⁹ AUT

There is a recognition that a fundamental change in funding is needed “*Lifelong learning paralleled with lifelong debts*”.¹¹⁰ Discontinuation of grants and introduction of fees runs counter to policies for widening access or attracting mature students and is therefore discouraging the very students the Government is keen to attract into HE. Partly this is down to misconceptions of the situation by potential students and they need clear and realistic information on sources of funding and the likely extent of their debts in order to make sensible choices. “*Any changes to funding must take access into consideration and include provision for adequate financial support so that the burden of debt is not prohibitive.*”¹¹¹

Several alternative funding proposals are put forward, including up-front maintenance awards, transfer of means-testing to LEAs, raising the earnings threshold. There is also a suggestion of targetting funding at groups such as those traditionally under-represented in HE eg through access bursaries¹¹². HEW does not advocate the abolition of tuition fees for Welsh students in isolation because of the damaging effects on recruitment of students from outside Wales.

Other points raised:

- ❑ Funding for postgraduates should not be forgotten in the midst of concerns for undergraduate tuition fees etc.
- ❑ Student support should be consistently applied and should be equitable.
- ❑ It needs to be appropriate to all forms of study including flexible and lifelong learning.
- ❑ The current student financing system is fragmented and leads to confusion¹¹³
- ❑ Part-time study should be funded on an equal basis with full-time.
- ❑ Lifestyles of students attracted by widening access differ from those of traditional students and economic pressures can be greater.¹¹⁴
- ❑ Funding arrangements need to take on board the necessity of the majority of students to supplement their finances by taking on part-time work.
- ❑ Underfunding at undergraduate level leading to student drop out etc has a knock-on effect on the supply of good postgraduates.
- ❑ Students who defer entry in order to build up financial resources by taking up employment may decide not to continue in full-time education.
- ❑ The cost of studying for disabled students is often higher than for their able-bodied peers because of the need to buy specialist equipment etc.
- ❑ There is a rise in additional costs for all students eg photocopying, field trips - items which may previously have been included in the overall fees for a course.
- ❑ Progression managers are needed to help students secure both adequate financing and appropriate arrangements for their HE study¹¹⁵
- ❑ Supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds and work-based/distance learning requires extensive funding¹¹⁶
- ❑ Some subject disciplines eg medicine and those allied to medicine have long academic years and do not therefore enable students to supplement their finances through part-time vacation work¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ NUS

¹¹¹ CBI

¹¹² NIACE

¹¹³ Cardiff

¹¹⁴ Glamorgan

¹¹⁵ Pontypridd College

¹¹⁶ NIACE

¹¹⁷ UWCM

In particular, it is recommended that the Committee refer to the detailed submission on this subject by the National Union of Students.

Questions to consider

- 1) Can HE funding in Wales be raised to levels comparable with England and, perhaps more relevantly, with Scotland?**
- 2) Can funding initiatives be more mission-sensitive and formula-based and less competitive?**
- 3) Can funding be over longer-term cycles to facilitate strategic planning?**
- 4) Can access to student funding be made available to all students regardless of their mode or pattern of study to encourage the growth of part-time and distance learning?**
- 5) Can the independent review of student funding look at the correlation between students working to finance their studies and student retention rates and the quality of their overall HE experience?**

6. Accountability

6.1 Context

It is accepted that as HEIs receive public funding, they have to be accountable for how they spend these resources. They must also demonstrate to stakeholders that they are providing a quality product. *“The standards and quality of qualifications has to be upheld if they are to retain their currency for learners, employers and the tax payer generally.”*¹¹⁸

Accountability is achieved via a number of bodies. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales monitors the financial health of HEIs. It requires auditable returns on student numbers, income and on how institutions use monies allocated for special initiatives. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) requires detailed statistics on the profile of students in HE including age, background, gender, qualifications on entry and exit etc. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education monitors the quality of HE provision.

The latter was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance service in the UK and of its collaborative provision overseas. It has recently announced a new review method. It reports on:

- ❑ Programme outcome standards – the appropriateness of the learning outcomes set by institutions in relation to subject benchmarks, qualification levels and the overall aims.
- ❑ The quality of learning opportunities – the effectiveness of teaching, learning resources and academic support
- ❑ Institutional management of standards and quality ie how the HEI ensures it meets national standards and assures the quality of its provision with reference to its own quality procedures.

In seeking to promote standards across the UK, the QAA is gradually introducing codes of practice relating to topics such as collaborative activity, external examiners, students with disabilities plus an overarching qualifications framework.

The work of the QAA is carried out in a set cycle of visits – some to look at subject areas, others to look at institutions’ internal quality mechanisms. Because the nature of these inspections has recently changed, QAA and therefore the institutions themselves have a fairly heavy programme of work to carry out. As far as Wales is concerned, individual institutions are audited as well as the overall University of Wales Registry. In view of the changes, it will obviously require a complete review of the role of the University of Wales Registry in guaranteeing the standards of University of Wales degrees.

In addition, HEIs have to meet the criteria set by professional bodies such as the Law Society, the IEE etc. Whilst the majority of the bodies to which HEIs are accountable are international or UK-wide bodies with rules and frameworks that cross national

¹¹⁸ NIACE

boundaries, HEIs in Wales are hoping the National Assembly for Wales can help reduce the burden of accountability which is seen as having grown over recent years to an unacceptable level. *“It is necessary to ensure that UK-wide arrangements .. develop in a fashion that is flexible and sensitive to the particular requirements of Wales.”*¹¹⁹

6.2 Is the current system fit for purpose?

There is agreement that HE should be accountable for the quality of its provision and for its use of public funds. This should be open and transparent and the view is expressed that the current Transparency Review should help document more clearly the costs of the sector’s teaching, research and administrative activities.

There has been much criticism in the educational press of late, however, about the current system of accountability. It is seen as over-burdensome, expensive, as having increased markedly in recent years and compliance-driven. This concern is reflected in many of the responses to this section. Some fear the accountability regime diverts resources away from students to audit *“paralysis by analysis”*.¹²⁰ This burden falls in particular on administrative staff, therefore, *“the recruitment and retention of high quality managers and administrative staff is vital in ensuring effective governance and identifying and promulgating good practice across the sector.”*¹²¹

HEW expresses the sector’s view that HEIs face mounting accountability demands. Whilst any one request for information may not be burdensome, the accumulation of requests can be. In this respect, respondents refer to the QAA Codes of Practice. These codes are acceptable individually but their implementation can become overwhelming and time-consuming, particularly for small institutions, when taken together. HEW also points to the amount of duplication engendered by multiple accountability requirements.

*“Ensuring the satisfactory financial health of an institution is not an issue of accountability; rather, it is an issue of efficiency and good management of long-term planning.”*¹²²

HEFCE have recently produced a report illustrating the high cost of the current regime of accountability – estimating direct costs alone to be £40 - £50 million for England which would give costs of £3 million for Wales pro-rata. HEW feels it represents poor value for money for both stakeholders and institutions.

One possible outcome of increasing accountability is that institutions will be *“forced into a process of creeping marginalisation whereby they make savings by targeting their most expensive and least popular courses and disciplines”*.¹²³ This may help solve an institution’s immediate financial problems but may lead to loss of diversity in Welsh HE and cutting back on the science and engineering base which will affect the Welsh economy.

One aspect of accountability that needs to be considered is the commercialisation of research. With universities becoming increasingly involved in economic generation

¹¹⁹ UWIC

¹²⁰ IChemE

¹²¹ AUA

¹²² Aberystwyth

¹²³ NATFHE

activities eg spin out companies, there are risks attached to this as with all commercial ventures. There is concern that institutions may become averse to taking risks because of accountability issues and that this may stifle creativity. Some commercial ventures will inevitably fail but this has to be properly managed and the potential risks need to be weighted against possible benefits. In order to achieve this, there is an acceptance that HEIs would greatly benefit from specialist advice on matters such as intellectual property rights and risk analysis.

Concern is expressed that the need for transparency and accountability should not erode the autonomy of institutions or prevent them from achieving their diverse missions.¹²⁴ The Chairmen of Higher Education Institutions in Wales reaffirm the statement in Dearing that *“Institutional autonomy should be respected. Whilst we take it as axiomatic that government will set the policy framework for higher education nationally, we equally take it as axiomatic that the strategic direction and management of individual institutions should be vested wholly in the governance and management structure of autonomous universities and colleges.”*

The AUT’s suggestions for ensuring open governance, whilst preserving the autonomy of institutions, include:

- ❑ Charters covering the rights of staff and students.
- ❑ Reserved business should be kept to a minimum and the outcomes reported in the next public session
- ❑ A need for institutions to have a code of ethics and an Ethics Committee
- ❑ A separation of powers between senate and the Court/Council

NATFHE expresses concern that staff, the Trade Unions and LEAs do not have the automatic right of representation on the Board of Governors. Staff governors are often excluded from decision making and vacancies to the Board do not have to be advertised publicly. They advocate that HEFCW should issue an advice document to all post 1992 institutions covering the issues of:

¹²⁴ Glamorgan

- ❑ Composition of the Board
- ❑ Full and equal membership for all governors
- ❑ Complete openness
- ❑ Advertising vacancies
- ❑ Equal opportunities and racism.

Concern is expressed that too much control can stifle creativity. *“Monitoring and control must co-exist with the need for innovation and development.”*¹²⁵ Aberystwyth also refers in its submission to the need for preserving institutional autonomy.

The effective governance of institutions is an area that has come under scrutiny following the reports by Nolan, Dearing and the National Audit Office. All HEIs in Wales have recently undertaken formal reviews of the effectiveness of their governing bodies. Whilst acknowledging that this is necessary, the University of Glamorgan expresses the hope that this too will not become a burdensome activity which may deter able individuals from wanting to become governors.

6.3 Ensuring satisfactory financial health

*“HE in Wales should be valued as an investment.”*¹²⁶

HEW feels there is a danger to the financial health of HEIs if they are left financially dependent on student recruitment and expansion and again raise the question of parity of funding with the rest of the UK. This view is echoed in Trinity’s submission. It goes on to speak of the need to counter-balance *“due financial diligence and the risks involved with encouraging innovation”*.

UWCM suggests that a more stable cycle of funding will contribute towards ensuring financial health. A similar view is taken by the NUS who state *“HEIs are suffering from initiative fatigue: short-term projects and pilots are being prioritised and cosseted and, as a result, long-term projects and strategic financial planning are falling by the wayside.”*

Cardiff point to the assistance given by the Funding Council’s good practice guides on governance and management which have enabled institutions to develop and improve their lines of governance.

Other suggestions include:

- ❑ Regular audit
- ❑ Good practice guides on financial management and value for money
- ❑ Involvement of users and communities in financial management of institutions
- ❑ If the most expensive and the least popular courses are cut, this leads to loss of diversity – sometimes in areas where we need to build up skills eg engineering¹²⁷.

6.4 Ensuring effective governance

Many respondents make the point that HEIs are autonomous institutions. This is supported by the submission from the Chairmen of Higher Education in Wales

¹²⁵ Llandrillo

¹²⁶ NATFHE

¹²⁷ NATFHE

Group. The group feels that great improvements have been made over recent years in the standard of governance in HEIs. This includes the setting out of clear aims and responsibilities and the putting in place of mechanisms for governors to monitor progress towards these aims.

Glamorgan points out that all HEIs have recently undertaken formal reviews of the effectiveness of their governing bodies. It feels this review needs to be maintained but in such a way as not to overburden governors or distract them from their tasks.

The AUT expresses concern that the recent slimming down of governing bodies may reduce representation for significant stakeholders. Similarly UNISON is concerned that governing bodies are not always broadly based. *“There is a need to ensure that governing bodies are properly representative of the communities they serve.”*¹²⁸

Questions to consider

- 1) How can the current system of accountability be made less burdensome and wasteful of resources?**
- 2) What scope does the Assembly have to reduce this burden?**
- 3) What is the correct balance between accountability and the autonomy of HEIs?**
- 4) How will the new QAA programme of quality assurance impact upon Welsh HE?**
- 5) What is the role of the University of Wales Registry and does it provide value for money and reduce the accountability burden for the small institutions?**
- 6) How clear is the status of each institution in academic QA terms?**

¹²⁸ UNISON

7. Other issues raised

7.1 Context

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to bring up any areas they felt were not covered by the questionnaire and which were deemed to fall under the scope of the review.

The main topic raised relates to human resource issues. The various unions in particular are concerned about the increasing use of casual staff. There is also a feeling that HE in Wales has not paid sufficient regard to issues relating to equal opportunities, gender and race.

7.2 Pay and Conditions

NATFHE points out that, when the Bett report was published, there had been a 30% relative decline in the pay of HE employees. The Bett recommendations have not been implemented and the position has worsened causing problems in staff recruitment and retention.

“Based upon Government figures, Welsh HE has one of the worst records of pay inequality between men and women when compared with UK HE as a whole.”¹²⁹ As has been stated earlier, the HE sector is one of the major employers in Wales but the trade unions feel some of the employment practices need careful scrutiny.

The increased use of casual staff is causing further problems. More and more staff are employed on fixed term, term-time only or temporary contracts which leads to insecurity of employment and consequently affects the ability to recruit and retain good staff. This is particularly true in relation to young research staff. Contracting out some of the non-academic functions is also becoming more common – a practice which UNISON feels leads to an inferior service.

The AUT feels that casualisation undermines career progression and contributes to the risk of exploitation of staff.

UNISON states that student numbers have doubled over the last decade and staff have contributed to a 6% productivity gain whilst their conditions of service and levels of pay have deteriorated. The AUT submission makes similar comments and states that the achievements in HE in coping with expansion over the past two decades have put a severe strain on the system and are undermining the prospect of HE in Wales as a viable career.

7.3 Professional Development

Staff in the HE sector, including administrative and support staff, need training in order to enable them to embrace the opportunities afforded by new technology. The AUT speaks of the need to manage technological change, involving all groups of staff in discussions about ICT developments.

¹²⁹ NATFHE

Increased administrative support has largely been targeted at generating information and making statutory returns rather than in providing support for learning and teaching.¹³⁰

7.4 Equal Opportunities

The Equal Opportunities Commission asks that the Assembly give attention to a number of areas of inequality in HE. Some issues relate specifically to human resource matters within the sector but other matters affect students as well. The points the Commission raises include:

- ❑ The under-representation of women in HE
- ❑ Gender segregation in subject choice
- ❑ Sex stereotyping in teaching and learning
- ❑ Pay inequality between men and women
- ❑ Data on the detrimental impact of current funding support mechanisms on students including particularly mature students, single parents etc.
- ❑ The lack of gender disaggregated data across a range of issues eg student support
- ❑ The absence of gender, race and disability from the social inclusion and widening participation agendas
- ❑ Particular areas of geography, culture and language within Wales.

The Commission urges the Assembly to consider the recommendations of the ETAN report¹³¹ as a first step to embedding equality of opportunity into the HE Review.

7.5 Disabled Students

Other sections of this report have already touched upon areas that relate to the ability of disabled students to access HE, particularly in the section on widening access.

There are of course statutory requirements relating to access and the QAA has recently introduced its own code of practice on Students with Disabilities against which HE institutions will be assessed during institutional review. However, Skill¹³² has found that many institutions are still not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 or even aware of their responsibilities. Skill advocates funding methodologies should take into account the need to encourage better practice in this area.

Complying with the Act and the Code of Practice will, of course, have resource implications in terms of providing buildings that are accessible to students with disabilities, specialist equipment, additional support services. One useful practice would be to carry out an audit of the needs of disabled students in Wales similar to the one carried out by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

However, it is also important that there is a culture change and that staff development is put in place so that lecturing and administrative staff acquire a better understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. *“All staff must be committed*

¹³⁰ AUT

¹³¹ Science Policies in the European Union: Fostering Excellence through Mainstreaming Gender Equality.

¹³² Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

*to the principle that anyone who has the capability for higher education should have the opportunity to benefit from it.*¹³³

Staff development could include overcoming prejudices about stereotypes, learning how to communicate with deaf students, adapting course material for visually impaired students; how to adapt practical courses, an awareness amongst technical staff of enabling technology. Skill does not, however, support developing specialist centres for students with particular disabilities as this will narrow student choice, particularly if a student's disabilities mean s/he needs to study close to home. The Disability Rights Commission is in favour of the centres of excellence approach and mentions the reputation of Bangor for its provision for dyslexic students.

Many institutions already have good support mechanisms in place but the picture is by no means even and a more global view needs to be taken of HE's responsibilities in this area. *"There needs to be standardisation of high quality, practical and effective support."*¹³⁴ The RNIB advocates a single, Higher Education Disability Access Agency to embrace entitlement, practical support and other access issues.

Skill has encouraged informal collaboration between HE disability advisers as a means of spreading good practice and sharing expertise and difficulties. It cites a number of more formal arrangements which are working successfully including a joint student needs assessment centre in the Manchester area; a network of careers advisers working with disabled students; and collaboration between the University of Glamorgan and UWIC in provision for dyslexic students. The Disability Rights Commission cites other examples such as the Joint Universities Deaf Education Centre established in Northern Ireland.

Funding is of course an issue for students with disabilities who often face higher costs because of the need to purchase specialist equipment or have work translated from one medium to another. The Disability Rights Commission points out that the Disabled Students' Allowance does not extend to those studying part-time courses of less than 50% of a full-time course and this therefore restricts access for disabled students. The various organisations representing disabled students also mention the need for information on funding for disabled students to be easily and widely available so that students know what their entitlements are before embarking on a course of study.

Other issues raised by the three organisations mentioned above include:

- Ensuring disabled provision is recorded and audited
- The poor condition of estates which limits the ability of HEIs to provide access
- Disabled students on work placement or field courses
- Better staff/student ratios to cope with the extra demands of supporting disabled students
- Financial incentives to encourage HEIs to make provision for disabled students
- A strategic approach to provision for disabled students

¹³³ Disability Rights Commission

¹³⁴ RNIB

The Next Step

During the course of the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee has had the opportunity to hear oral submissions of, and put questions to the individual HEIs, representative bodies such as HEW , Fforwm and NUS.

During the next stage presentations on the main issues will be made by prominent speakers from the UK Higher Education Sector. At these presentations, HEW will have an opportunity to put the Welsh sector's views on each of the topic areas.

Appendix 1

Acronyms used

Acronym	Organisation
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
AUA	Association of University Administrators
AUT	Association of University Teachers
BBSRC	Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council
BDA	British Dental Association
BPS	British Pharmacological Society
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCW	Countryside Council for Wales
CHEIW	Chairmen of Higher Education Institutions in Wales
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CWCHE	Committee of Welsh Colleges of Higher Education
DRC	Disability Rights Commission
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Estyn	H M's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
FEDA	
GTCW	General Teaching Council for Wales
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEW	Higher Education Wales (formerly Heads of Higher Education Wales – HHEW)
IChemE	Institution of Chemical Engineers
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
LMS	London Mathematical Society
NATFHE	
NEWI	North East Wales Institute of Higher Education
NIACE	Cymru
NUS	National Union of Students
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
RCN	Royal College of Nursing
RNIB	Royal National Institute for the Blind
SIHE	Swansea Institute of Higher Education
Skill	National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
UACE	Universities Association for Continuing Education
UKCOSA	The Council for International Education
UNISON	
Acronym	Organisation
Universities UK	Formerly Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
UWCM	University of Wales College of Medicine
UWCN	University of Wales College, Newport
UWIC	University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
WDA	Welsh Development Agency
WLA	Welsh Library Association
WLB	Welsh Language Board

WNB	Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
WTB	Wales Tourist Board

