

Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 13 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (in the Chair), Toni Schiavone (Vice Chair), Caroline Davies, Gareth Cork, Stephen Nicholls, Dafydd Rhys, David Elis-Williams; Cathy Clark, Julie Cook, Tim Palazon (by video link).

The meeting was quorate throughout.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Michelle Kerswell (Curriculum & Welsh Medium Provision Manager), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk), Catrin Gilkes (simultaneous interpreter); Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources – by video link).

Also Attending: Joy Williams and 4 AOC|ALW learners (minutes 1 and 2); Raoul Humphreys (minutes 1 to 4); Jeff Greenidge (minutes 1 to 4 – by video link).

Apologies: Salamatu Fada, Chris Franks, Iwan Hywel, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Daryl Leeworthy, Sonia Reynolds (Vice Chair), Suzanne Samuel, Guy Wallace Smith; Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum & Performance).

2. Discussion with our invited group of learners and their tutor

Introductions were made by Joy Williams, tutor, and four female AOC|ALW learners who were studying Digital Literacy at her class in Llay Library. They talked of the range of skills they had acquired – from facility with iPads and using the Mail Merge programme to how to contact relatives virtually in Australia; from minute-taking on a laptop, to how to remain safe financially when operating on-line. There was good IT equipment at the Llay suite, and class members also met socially outside term-time.

In answer to Council members' questions the learners said they had found out about the course via word of mouth and through noticeboard advertising at the Library. They believed there was potential for more physical advertising both outside the Library and in the local free flyer magazine: 'traditional' marketing techniques were what they believed would work best for such a course. **Michelle Kerswell undertook to follow up on their ideas for promotion, and on their stories as a potential case study (-ies) for the Organisation.**

3. Presentation by Raoul Humphreys: Business Development Strategy, November 2019

A slideshow presentation was provided, for those in the Wrexham location only. Raoul Humphreys underlined the fact that a transformational challenge was in prospect, because funding strictures could put the Organisation out of business relatively soon if new initiatives were not successful. He explained the ranking scoring system he had used on the six business development options analysed in his report, though he acknowledged that a pragmatic option, bridging the boundaries between them, also existed. In terms of current provision, while there were good relations with trade unions and some decent examples of work with particular employers especially in the 'community professionals' field, there was

little direct business-to-business work and minimal direct learner (i.e. 'consumer') recruitment. This he believed was a field open to significant development. The contractual employment basis and turnover of tutors – the 'level of tutor engagement' – were potentially weakening factors he felt, as many naturally sought greater job security elsewhere; but they were in his view more important as recruiters of students and 'salespeople' with other organisations than currently acknowledged, and therefore should form a key part of any business strategy. This was especially because current potential EU money for partnered projects would diminish radically after the coming 2 years, so might help with transformation but not represent a sustainable income source. Certain recommendations made in the report were already being followed up by senior staff, who had good knowledge of the education 'market'; a second series of recommendations could involve using some of the organisation's financial reserves, so needed further contemplation before decisions were taken. It was however positive overall that the Organisation had both strength in depth in personnel terms and in the fact that there were reserves capable of being spent.

In response, Kathryn Robson, noting that the following week's Resources Committee meeting would look at proposals for use of part of our financial reserves, stated that she had concerns about the emphasis placed in the Strategy on the capacity of existing staff to carry out this additional business development work, rather than more emphasis being placed on the pursuit of grants. Julie Cook mentioned Wales TUC Cymru as a means of accessing a swathe of employers which had close links with that body. Dafydd Rhys referred to Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, local and community links and regionally-specific courses tailored to needs as means of further extending our reach that were already available. It was pointed out that, following the introductory experiment, there were only 6 tutors on full-time contracts (and a further 3 had been made redundant over the previous year because of the end of the Access courses at Plas Tan y Bwlch). Raoul Humphreys accepted that it would be a major challenge to move to predominantly full-time tutors as part of a revised business model, and that it ran somewhat counter to the ethos of the organisation. But he referred to the experience of 'Prescriptions for Learning' in Cornwall and cross-subsidy of loss-leading courses as means of further revising the organisational set-up.

In Toni Schiavone's view the Organisation needed to respond better to the Welsh Government's priorities, embracing them rather than complaining about them (as was done on occasion). AOC|ALW should certainly aim to influence those priorities over time better to fit our vision; but there needed to be more cross-fertilisation of good practice across regions, greater emphasis on workplace education where there was £140 million available annually, including in the field of apprenticeships, and a case made for offering Welsh language education to refugees. David Elis-Williams conversely said that there was something rather inevitable in Option BD1 – increasing new learners on existing fee paying programmes – coming top on the criteria utilised, as we were beholden to the Welsh Government's priorities. Yet the consistent point made in our Risk Register was the need to diversify from the 90%+ dependency that we had on Welsh Government funding. Raoul Humphreys agreed with the need to move away from that near-monopoly, but experience told him that it would be hugely difficult to do that in the short-term and it might take 3+ years to achieve it: hence the degree of practicality behind some of the recommendations. Since all educational institutions were reacting to the importance of diversification in what they were providing, the fact that FE colleges and others had significantly greater financial and human resources to commit to such new work meant it was therefore likely to be a saturated market, other than in specialist niches which AOC|ALW needed to fill.

John Graystone summarised the discussion that had been held. There was approval in principle for the Strategy and the analysis conducted as part of the work. **It was agreed that the Senior Leadership Team and the Resources Committee would now look in greater detail at the Strategy's recommendations and would make further submissions to the Council based on them.**

4. Presentation by Jeff Greenidge: Restructuring of Community-based Adult Learning in Wales and Positioning of AOC|ALW as the National Strategic Body

A PowerPoint presentation was again visible to those in the Wrexham office only. Jeff Greenidge said that he believed the Adult Community Learning Grant already added value in Wales: at a personal level he was not convinced that a restructuring, and the creation of a National Strategic Body, would necessarily improve matters. He had observed and read reports about strong pockets of good educational activity that were being undertaken in certain regions by AOC|ALW: he felt these provided the basis for ‘quick wins’ for the Organisation that were feasible by working in line with governmental priorities and focusing courses’ impact. He mentioned good practice carried out elsewhere – in Rochdale, and through Nuffield Health initiatives. These were examples of paying back on investment through contributing to other bits of governmental activity and policy such as health, or climate change.

Kathryn Robson acknowledged that there had recently been greater talk at senior education levels of more collaboration between current providers, which could indeed mean that there was no move towards the creation of a National Body as Phase 2 of the proposals. The usefulness of this particular piece of work amongst other things had nevertheless been in showing how poor AOC|ALW was in providing evidence of educational and life progression among our learners and of the broader impact of what we were doing. Jeff Greenidge said that if anything he believed the Organisation was actually quite weak in showing where its learners originated in fundamental educational terms; improving that would in turn then help show progression and impact achieved. All this could be reflected in changes that the Welsh Government was proposing in terms of self-assessment reports from organisations, where a different basis for impact achieved could be put forward by AOC|ALW.

5. Chief Executive’s Report, November 2019

Kathryn Robson explained the slightly revised format of the Report, with a concluding section representing the targets set down for varying priorities. She spoke of the positive Estyn inspection that had just ended on adult education in Gwynedd & Môn, where there had been good collaboration between AOC|ALW and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. It was hoped to use some of the conclusions from it to influence Welsh Government’s broader policies in the field – for example in supporting more unaccredited education. Julie Cook was happy to see in section 4.2 that the organisation was responding to Welsh Government consultation exercises, asking if Council members could see such responses. **It was agreed that in future it would be routine to copy Council members in as part of the process of responding to consultations by the Welsh Government.**

There had been a slight downward trajectory on the Completion, Attainment and Success data for 2018-19 for reasons set out in the document: achieving the National Comparator figures however remained an overarching objective. John Graystone added that during October’s meeting with the Minister for Education there had been discussion of the reduction in the number of youth centres in Cardiff in recent years: AOC|ALW should use its good standing in youth and community work to strengthen its position as a co-ordinating force in that field. On a forthcoming meeting with police representatives, Toni Schiavone mentioned the possibility of pressing teaching through the medium of Welsh with forces. It was noted that Financial Contingency Fund utilisation had been good in 2018-19 but not so Additional Learning Support money, where less than 10% of the allocation was utilised. It was anticipated that in preparation for the Additional Learning Needs legislation’s introduction there would be greater awareness raised amongst staff of that particular funding source.

The updated Organisational Values were approved. Dafydd Rhys had set these against a Massachusetts Institute of Technology table measuring culture within organisations, in which AOC|ALW had scored positively on 3 out of the 4 key indicators.

6. Risk Register for November 2019

There was discussion on how the risks relevant to Raoul Humphreys's consultancy work (1.1.1) on funding and business development tallied with risk 1.1.3 of being unable to influence important funding and delivery strategies. On the Business Development Manager's role it was reported that there had been a more positive response in quantity and quality to the recent re-advertising of the post, for which the closing date was the following day.

7. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 23 September 2019 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous Council meeting held at the Dragon Hotel, Swansea were approved as a correct record. Two matters in the minutes were discussed further:

Minute 2 – Council members' departures: the Chair read out a letter received that same morning from Nick Taylor, elected trustee/governor for North East Wales, announcing his immediate resignation from that role (including from his Resources Committee seat) and from chairing the north east Wales Regional Forum. The Chair also referred to a card sent by Gerry Jenson, thanking the Council for its best wishes on her stepping down as a governor and for the meal vouchers that she had received from AOC|ALW.

Minute 3 – Astor Fields, Harlech property update: the advice provided by the Council at its previous meeting on how to approach the building encroachment matter at Astor Fields (north of Harlech town) had been followed. The Grŵp Cynefin housing association was covering the costs of our solicitors, Eversheds, on the matter.

8. Senior Management Team Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), 2018-19

This paper represented an end-of-year report: it had been circulated later than the bundle of other documents, and was additionally tabled. There was one point discussed, namely the advisability under 1.1 of continuing with a 5% target for Welsh medium/bilingual provision in 2019-20 given that the total achieved had been only 1% in the previous year. The decision to retain it was explained as being a purposeful one, providing a target that would prove challenging in order to build on the past year's groundwork. That was an issue discussed regularly at Senior Leadership Team and Senior Management Team meetings.

9. Welsh Government's Self-Assessment Framework on Governance Effectiveness

The final draft of this completed voluntary self-assessment exercise spreadsheet was studied. The one comment on it came from the Chair, who believed more examples that supported the evaluation statements should be quoted in the 'sources of evidence' column. **Should any Council member have further detailed comments, these should be sent by e-mail to Stephen Thomas by 20 December 2019.**

10. Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting of 30 September 2019

The Council noted the minutes from two months earlier, and the fact that the Committee was meeting once more the following week, in Cardiff.

11. Minutes of the Learner Experience Committee meeting of 23 October 2019

Caroline Davies had been formally installed as its Chair at this Committee meeting. Prevent programme training and policy had been a significant part of discussions: it was confirmed that 100% of our tutors had now undertaken the on-line training for it, and that a new AOC|ALW web-site section was available on the issue. On the Prevent policy and procedure document, a revised, compromise wording was to go to the following week's Resources Committee meeting for final approval. There had been a more positive reaction to our approach to Prevent at the recent Gwynedd & Môn adult education Estyn inspection than during its national inspection of early 2019. A briefing from the Education and Training Foundation on 'What governors and board members need to know about the Prevent duty' had been circulated with the papers. The first week of December would be a Prevent Awareness Week within the Organisation, and as part of it **there would be an on-line training module on Prevent for governors to complete, which would be circulated by Stephen Thomas.**

The minutes as a whole were noted, as was the accompanying Curriculum Report for October 2019.

12. Feedback on the Council meeting

The technological aspects of the meeting had only been partially successful. One video link (to Sonia Reynolds's home) had not worked. At the Cardiff office venue there had been some sound problems, and it had not proved possible to show the two consultants' presentations live there. Furthermore there should have been a second simultaneous interpreter provided (or a technological solution found for that issue) at that venue, and no lunch had been offered to participants there either.

13. Confirmed Council and other related meeting dates for 2020

- Monday 27 January 2020: Cardiff
- Thursday 12 March: Newtown
- AGM – Thursday 26 March: Merthyr Tydfil
- Wednesday 20 May: Ebbw Vale
- Strategic Planning Day – Thursday 2 July: Llandrindod Wells
- Thursday 23 July: Bangor

ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 2	Discussion with our invited group of learners and their tutor	Michelle Kerswell undertook to follow up on their ideas for promotion, and on their stories as a potential case study (-ies) for the Organisation.	MK	March 2020

Minute 3	Presentation by Raoul Humphreys: Business Development Strategy	It was agreed that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Resources Committee would now look in further detail at the Strategy and its recommendations and make further submissions to the Council based on them.	KR / CH / MB / SLT / Resources Committee	January 2020
Minute 5	Chief Executive's Report, November 2019	It was agreed that in future it would be routine to copy Council members in as part of the process of responding to consultations by the Welsh Government.	KR / CH	January 2020
Minute 9	Welsh Government's Self-Assessment Framework on Governance Effectiveness	Should any member have further detailed comments on the Framework, these should be sent by e-mail to Stephen Thomas by 20 December.	Council members / ST	December 2019
Minute 11	Minutes of the Learner Experience Committee meeting of 23 October 2019	There would be an on-line training module on Prevent for governors to complete, which would be circulated by Stephen Thomas.	CH / ST	December 2019