

Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 11 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (in the Chair), Julie Cook, Iwan Hywel, Tim Palazon, Toni Schiavone (Vice Chair), Gareth Cork, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Chris Franks, Dafydd Rhys, David Elis-Williams; Cathy Clark (from minute 3 onwards). The meeting was quorate throughout.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services and Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum and Performance), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Catrin Alun (simultaneous interpreter).

Apologies: Caroline Davies, Salamatu Fada, Daryl Leeworthy, Stephen Nicholls, Sonia Reynolds (Vice Chair), Suzanne Samuel, Guy Wallace Smith, Nick Taylor.

2. Council members – arrivals and departure

Following interviews held in mid-August, the Search Committee was recommending the appointment of two Council members – Tim Palazon, who introduced himself to the meeting; and Salamatu Fada, who was unable to be present. The Council confirmed their appointments. Both would sit on the Learner Experience Committee. This meant that no additional Council member had joined the Audit Committee (a point raised at the previous Council meeting): a transfer of membership from one of the other Council Committees would now be needed to make that happen.

It was also reported that Gerry Jenson had stood down as a Council member in August, following over six years' service as part of the governing body and its predecessor 'shadow' board. Thanks were recorded for her significant contributions during that time and an appropriate recognition for her commitment would be sent to her on the Council's behalf.

3. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 18 July 2019 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous Council meeting held at Maesmawr Hall Hotel, Caersws were approved as a correct record. Four matters in the minutes were discussed further:

Minute 2 – Coleg Harlech site update: the completion of the campus site's sale had finally occurred in the previous week for £200,000 after resolution of the Land Registry matter. Formal thanks were expressed for David Elis-Williams's input on the matter of Coleg Harlech over a long period. It was reported that demolition of the adjoining St. David's Hotel had eventually commenced.

AOC|ALW remained the owner of other property in the town, however. A new dilemma had arisen concerning a plot of land formerly owned to the north of the town – adjacent to our remaining land at Astor Fields – and sold in late 2013 to an ex-employee of CHWEAN (Coleg Harlech WEA North Wales). That employee had built affordable, social housing on the plot destined for Grŵp Cynefin, a housing

association. Unfortunately there had been encroachment on to the land that we continued to own there and on to the route still used to gain access to the grazing fields that remained ours. **The Council advised staff to communicate with/through Grŵp Cynefin (whose lawyers had raised the problem), using Rowland Jones Surveyors as advisors, and to maintain positive relations with the Grŵp as it might prove an important body in future developments on our retained land. It did not advise contacting Snowdonia National Park Authority or Cyngor Gwynedd Council on the matter, and felt that the access route issue was more important than the loss of some territory to the building.**

Minute 2 – Welsh Government liaison: contrary to the decision reached at the previous Council meeting, no letter had been sent to senior civil servants. This was because the comment made at the May Council meeting concerning analysis of our generic educational output had in fact been correct, based on technical differences between ‘qualifications’ and ‘certificates’ provided through our accredited learning.

Minute 3 – Use of ‘.ac.uk’ as a domain name by the organisation: it was confirmed that AOC|ALW was eligible to take up such an option and consideration was now being given as to what precise name(s) to use as part of that domain. It appeared that NUS-related advantages would not flow from this step to our learners as they did not study long enough hours; the potential Microsoft-associated benefits arising still however needed to be affirmed.

Minute 3 – Issues to confirm and agree upon from the July Strategic Planning sessions: there was discussion of the importance of consistent use of the descriptive phrase ‘and democratic movement for adult education in Wales’ relating to the Organisation. **It was confirmed that it should be used frequently in our documents/on our web-site, though not as part of the organisational strap-line, and that its Welsh version should henceforth read ‘a’r mudiad democrataidd dros addysg oedolion yng Nghymru’.**

4. Follow-up to Strategic Planning Day and Minister’s Statement

The Minister for Education’s Statement of July 2019 concerned the Community-Based Adult Learning Grant of £4.3 million annually disbursed by the Welsh Government to local authorities. Thus it represented a relatively small proportion of ACL provision in Wales as a whole. With redistribution of that sum to come in phase 1 of the stated plan, there was likely to be competition for its allocation. The employment of Jeff Greenidge as a consultant since our July Strategic Planning Day was specifically to do with following up that issue. Further discussion with senior civil servants showed that they were beholden to the reforms that would bring in the PCET post-16 education body: it could therefore be a quango or even virtual organisation that undertook the future commissioning role for the Grant’s distribution.

Council members were of the opinion that the political route of influence, for example through the Minister’s Special Advisor, was the key one to pursue on this matter. However enticing it was to try and secure such a role as a national supervisory body in the field for the Organisation, though, it was most important for AOC|ALW to remain a provider of education itself, not merely or primarily a regulatory or commissioning body. That was more of a governmental function, rather than one for an independent charity such as ourselves. The example of *Cymraeg i Oedolion* was put forward as being an institution of that type. It was agreed that AOC|ALW’s priority was to strengthen itself with or without that role being granted to it: the addition of ‘The National Community College’ as our strap-line thereby reflected our existing presence, rather than being a pre-emptive attempt at influencing the outcome of the process of reshaping the Community-Based Adult Learning Grant by the Welsh Government.

5. Chief Executive's Report, September 2019

Kathryn Robson spoke of the three consultants who had been present over lunch to meet Council members: Jeff Greenidge, Raoul Humphreys and Nicola Perkins. She provided further information on their backgrounds, with Raoul Humphreys being the only one totally new to the organisation. His employment had been prompted by the failure earlier in 2019 to recruit a Business Development Manager. His remit was to present a report which would come before the Council on further transition needed by the Organisation to evolve successfully. As previously explained, Jeff Greenidge was to prepare a report on likely scenarios before and after phase 1 of the Community-Based Adult Learning Grant was in place. Given his role as Chairman of the Learning and Work Institute in Wales, his was the one appointment where there could be a perceived conflict of interest: that had been catered for by ensuring that his work for AOC|ALW was undertaken in his capacity as a freelance consultant. Nicola Perkins had been previously involved in advising on personnel matters at AOC|ALW, and was preparing a workforce strategy in anticipation of the forthcoming changes. Together, their inputs would be linked to the Quality Development Plan and Self-Assessment Review, forming a comprehensive development strategy for the organisation.

Council members thought, on the balance of length and readability, that this was a good model for a Chief Executive's report. In answer to questions, it was clarified that the Business Development Manager position had not been scrapped; rather the aim was to recruit to it once the above strategy was in place. Raoul Humphreys had been appointed on the basis of a tender exercise involving 6 applicants, and was formerly Chief Executive of the Cornwall College Group, while Nicola Perkins was a human resources consultant previously Director of HR at Gower College Swansea. The timescale for completion of each of the three distinct pieces of work was the end of the current academic term. The money being spent collectively on them was c£15,000 – equivalent to four months' costs of a Business Development Manager. **It was agreed that a brief written description of their roles and backgrounds would be circulated with the meeting's minutes.**

The academic data figures for 2018-19 were quite reassuring, though as there was always a registration/certification backlog at the close of an academic year they were not yet finalised. AOC|ALW was now represented on all 3 Regional Skills Partnerships, and had been asked to lead on their behalf in presenting the case for a 'right to lifelong learning' as per the Minister's undertaking. There were two meetings with the Minister for Education due this term, plus a role on the 1919 Adult Education 100 Commission, underlining the importance of Welsh differences and playing a part at the Centenary Report's UK launch on 19 November.

Council members were heartened to see the positive news on trades union education, but less so on the slow progress being made on Welsh medium courses: in the view of one member, achieving the 5% coverage target required the recruitment of full-time tutors dedicated to that end for it to be achievable. There were small if important examples of good practice in approaches to applying the Welsh Language Standards in terms of phone messaging, bilingual Council meetings and staff/tutor language training, but these would count for little without such effective increases in our educational provision, as other bodies would soon fill that space otherwise.

The services received from becoming an associate of the Bevan Foundation were spelled out. The Welsh Government's response to our challenge to its Financial Contingency Fund proposal was still to be received. And on staff appraisal reform, the experience of some Council members was that it was more important to react to the staff's feedback, rather than only to that of the management, concerning the new scheme.

6. Management Accounts, August 2018 – July 2019

Mark Baines said that the whole-year accounts showed a positive, solid position. David Elis-Williams added that there were no surprises in these end-of-year figures, as the Resources Committee had accompanied the overarching financial trends throughout the year. The comparative volatility of previous years had been overcome, and as a result recommendations would come before the following week's Resources Committee meeting on how to invest part of the Organisation's large cash reserves holding. That meeting would also look at the potential need for extra spending on marketing and appropriate ways to mark Coleg Harlech's history. There was discussion on how the teachers' pay award of 2.7% for 2019-20 might affect the current year's financial position.

7. Risk Register for September 2019

It was accepted that this should in future be placed immediately after the Chief Executive's Report on the Council's agenda. The top two risks cited, on financial matters, had been expanded upon in that Report and discussed at length in the previous minutes, with appointment of the consultants a development reflected in the Register which the Council needed to note. While the risk ratings themselves (colours/points scores) did not necessarily need to change regularly from one version of the Register to the next, the narrative descriptions of the mitigating actions taken for adding means of assurance should certainly evolve between meetings (as they had done here).

8. Marketing Plan 2019-20 with appendices

This collection of four documents was presented to show how the organisation had reacted to the Council's points, raised in the previous academic year, concerning greater emphasis on marketing and communications. It had been prepared by Jonathan Goddard, whose phased return to work had now reached the point where he was once more full-time. The development of on-line course enrolment and payment through our web-site was a big step forward, though such things were considered to have been a long time coming by certain Council members. Conclusions from Raoul Humphreys's work would be fed into this Plan. A budget of £65,000 was (again) generally felt to be rather conservative for our marketing needs, irrespective of such conclusions. It was suggested that the following year's version of the Plan should have particular actions attached to its stated objectives, and that those same objectives should be divided into short-, medium- and long-term ones.

The importance of maintaining strong on-line linking (inc. hyperlinking) and cross-referencing consistency to partner organisations on both the web-site and social media was underlined. That could be something brought in formally and underwritten in partnership agreements. While there would be reports on the numbers of hits and metrics relating to the web-site and social media during the year, these were not considered enough on their own: there was a case for an evaluation of whether the products, levels of activity and overall budget were themselves effective and adequate for our needs.

A request came from Jonathan Goddard for blog contributions from Council members. Willingness was expressed, but the feeling was that there were more likely to be contributions from around the table (and elsewhere) if the list of suggested blog themes was less process-dominated, and included learners' stories.

9. Constitutional Review Process 2019-20

Stephen Thomas outlined the timetable to be followed on this leading up to the AGM in spring 2020, the scale of the consultation and the likely concentration (at the outset of the process, at least) on review of matters appertaining to membership issues. The Campaign, Membership and Communications Group would additionally be involved in the review at some stage. The Clerk confirmed that systems were such that the Organisation knew who all of its members were, but that it was their clear categorisation and updating of status that most needed revised codification.

The composition of the Council was also open to review. Despite the future creation of a strategic body for the Community-Based Adult Learning Grant and occasional messages from certain strands of the Welsh Government on a need for ‘modernisation’, there was no indication at present that this aspect of governance would be as central to the review process as it had been in 2016. Members were reminded of the existence of the Humphreys Review model of further education governance though, and of the need for congruence here with the three consultants’ eventual conclusions.

10. Feedback on the Council meeting

There was little enthusiasm expressed for the venue, the meeting room or the refreshments on offer. The two most recent additions to the Council who were present gave their positive impressions on what they considered to be informed and informative questioning by members on the key matters. Given the appearance of the three consultants for lunch only, an undertaking was made that each would attend a future Council meeting to present their draft or full report findings.

11. Confirmed Council and other related meeting dates for 2019-20

- Tuesday 26 November 2019: Wrexham
- Monday 27 January 2020: Cardiff
- Thursday 12 March: Newtown
- AGM - Thursday 2 April: Merthyr Tydfil or St. Fagans
- 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 3	Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 18 July 2019 and matters arising	The Council advised staff to communicate with/through Grŵp Cynefin (whose lawyers had raised the land problem), using Rowland Jones Surveyors as advisors, and to maintain positive relations with the Grŵp as it might prove an important body in future developments on our retained land at Astor Fields. It did not advise contacting Snowdonia National Park Authority or Cyngor	KR / CH	October 2019

		Gwynedd Council on the matter, and felt that the access route issue was more important than the loss of some territory to the building.		
Minute 3	Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 18 July 2019 and matters arising	It was confirmed that the words 'and democratic movement for adult education in Wales' should be used frequently in our documents/on our web-site, though not as part of the organisational strap-line, and that its Welsh version should henceforth read ' <i>a'r mudiad democrataidd dros addysg oedolion yng Nghymru</i> '.	KR / CH / Jonathan Goddard	October 2019
Minute 5	Chief Executive's Report, September 2019	It was agreed that a brief written description of the roles and backgrounds of the three consultants currently engaged would be circulated with the meeting's minutes.	KR / ST	October 2019