



COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business
1.30 p.m., Thursday 24 September 2020
Held at multiple locations, via Microsoft Teams software

Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 11 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (in the Chair), Toni Schiavone (Vice Chair), Cathy Clark, Gareth Cork, Salamatu Fada, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Suzanne Samuel, Guy Wallace Smith, Daryl Leeworthy, Stephen Nicholls; Dafydd Rhys (other than one part of minute 4); Chris Franks (fully from minute 6 onwards). The meeting was quorate throughout.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum & Performance), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Siôn Aled Owen (interpreter - consecutive translation).

Also: Jayne McAleer (tutor) - minutes 1 and 2 only.

Apologies: Julie Cook, Caroline Davies, Tim Palazon, Sonia Reynolds (Vice Chair).

2. An Inspire! Award winner

The Inspire! Awards were an annual event in the further education calendar, run by the Learning and Work Institute Wales. At the 2020 virtual version, AOC|ALW learner Jamie Evans had won the Health and Well-being Award. Though he was unable to join the Council meeting, his tutor and nominator Jayne McAleer described his story since he enrolled on one of her Psychology courses some 30 months earlier. Having had both physical and psychological problems when growing up, Jamie blossomed in confidence and had become a voracious attendee of multiple courses. He was now on an Access course in humanities and social sciences for university entrance and aimed to work as a Learning Support Assistant in future – a natural progression, as he was a keen helper of fellow students.

Congratulations were relayed to Jamie, and to Jayne McAleer as his inspiration. Certain Council members felt his was a not unfamiliar story: a student who was talked down at school (sometimes linked to childhood ill health) and whose talents were only realised as an adult. It was admirable that a tutor had supported him in this way, so avoiding a potential downward spiral. His full story was available on AOC|ALW's web-site and via social media. Council members thanked Jayne for her work and contribution to the meeting.

3. In Memoriam; New Appointments and Remaining Vacancies

The Chair informed Council members of the deaths of two people who played important parts in the work of the Organisation. Gerry Jenson, who had died earlier that month, had been both vice Chair and a committee Chair in recent years after a long career in further education in north Wales, and was a major contributor to successful continuity following the two organisational mergers of 2014 and 2015. The Organisation had been represented at her funeral and information would be circulated on how to make a

contribution in her memory, should individuals wish to do so. Hywel Thomas, former WEA South Wales Treasurer, trustee of that body for 16 years and scion of the Barry branch, had passed away in March 2020. His daughter had recently informed the Organisation of that news: Jenni Jones-Annetts spoke of his commitment to the cause of lifelong learning.

The Chair proceeded to propose two governance appointments, following recently held interviews: Dona Lewis as an appointed governor for an Affiliated and Partner Organisation seat; and Judith Evans as a 'governor-in-waiting' (pending a vacancy) and co-opted member of the Resources Committee. Both appointments were approved by the Council. That left 3 remaining Council member vacancies - for elected roles representing the North West and North East Wales regions, and one learner governor slot.

4. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 23 July 2020 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous Council meeting, held through Microsoft Teams, were approved as a correct record. There were updates to three matters in the minutes. On the task and finish working group on branch futures (minute 5), TIAA's internal audit report on relations between branches and the central Organisation had been copied to the three Council members sitting on that group. From the same minute, the diversity survey for Council members had been completed by 13 of the 16 current Council members: remaining members were exhorted to answer it, as data from it would be included in the Organisation's annual diversity report in December. Regarding minute 8, a written update was provided on the staffing restructure (with Dafydd Rhys leaving the meeting for this item). One amendment to the proposals had emerged during the consultation phase and would be presented for approval at the following week's Resources Committee meeting. The current situation regarding the five transferred tutors, voluntary redundancies, potential redeployment and 'suitable alternative employment' was explained to members.

5. Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting of 31 July 2020

The Council noted these minutes, introduced by Guy Wallace Smith. The annual internal audit had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning that some of its pre-agreed work was still outstanding. Those reports thus far completed provided a relatively strong set of assurances. Minute 4, regarding the Welsh Government's letter on student data, elicited discussion. On minute 5 and responses to Covid-19, confidence and comfortableness for staff were important criteria in the gradual re-opening of offices, with Bangor (nearing completion of its refurbishment) and Wrexham (unopened by the landlord, Unite the union) not yet opened. Differences between unitary authority areas' lockdown regulations were monitored and conveyed to colleagues; and there had been health and safety assessments of staff members' home working conditions.

6. Chief Executive's Report September 2020, inc. Curriculum Report

There had been a range of new approaches to Welsh medium provision, including sessions held in the Late Summer School/Ysgol Haf Bach Mihangel and a British Sign Language course through the medium of Welsh. A meeting had occurred earlier in the week with the head of the Canolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Genedlaethol/National Centre for Learning Welsh, about the teaching of WSOL (Welsh for Speakers of Other Languages) on our newly obtained Home Office funded project for Asylum Seekers and Migrants. The fact that AOC|ALW was now a recognised provider of Institute of Leadership and Management courses, following work by the Business Development Manager, offered new opportunities to generate income beyond Welsh Government core monies (including in Welsh language provision, with community

enterprises with which there already existed links). That development and the continuing expansion of delivery on digital platforms were thought to be admirable advances to strengthen the Organisation's sustainability, including through greater full cost recovery courses.

It was noted that Zoom and Adobe Connect had been used as virtual platforms for seminars and the recent 'national' Regional Forum, allowing simultaneous interpretation in Welsh to take place (unlike Microsoft Teams). That was a statutory requirement for our public meetings, and it was true that more learners and partner organisations were used to operating on Zoom. Experimentation was going on, but there was no capacity (staffing or finance wise) to offer all of the alternative platforms.

The efforts to maintain the profile of part-time and community based adult education with the Welsh Government continued. As for the draft Tertiary Education and Research Bill (PCET) there was disappointingly little mention of adult learning within it: **Council members would be invited to contribute to the Organisation's response to it.**

There was no finance paper before the Council on this occasion. The rapidly shifting picture meant that it was likely that there would now be a surplus shown for the 2019-20 financial year; and grants for IT equipment and cleaning costs were positive new pieces of funding too for 2020-21. But they did not counterweigh the dangers of clawback of educational provision funding by the Welsh Government in this current financial year. Dafydd Rhys thought the Covid-19 situation in fact represented a good opportunity to show the Welsh Government the importance of the 'softer' aspects of AOC|ALW's work – i.e. non-accredited learning, and contributions to health, well-being and community engagement.

The Council agreed to an extension for the Senior Management Team Key Performance Indicators period to December 2020, with their review by the Council at its January 2021 meeting; and to them following a calendar year cycle in their operation from then onwards.

7. Risk Register for September 2020

While some descriptions and mitigating steps had changed relative to the July version, there were no alterations in the risk ratings quoted. It was accepted that the financial clawback point raised in the previous minute should be reflected more clearly in risk 1.2.3. It was also felt that with big governmental deficits imminent (both at Welsh and UK levels) there would inevitably be adverse knock-on financial effects from reduced government funding. That would not be a reflection of mismanagement on AOC|ALW's part: funding difficulties were highly likely to lie ahead for all further education institutions.

8. Membership Report – Affiliated and Partner Organisations List

Stephen Thomas explained the contents of the paper and proposed that the Council extend membership of the Organisation to those bodies included in the extensive lists, free of charge. There was discussion about the sub-divided lists of partner (accreditation and delivery) bodies and networks within the document. Members were of the view that there should be prioritisation among the bodies mentioned there in terms of membership, as they were so varied and sometimes difficult to categorise. There were also some gaps – for example bodies outside Wales that should be proposed as members in the same way, such as WEA England and Scotland, and the Co-operative College.

The Council thanked officers for the submission of an interesting paper and happily confirmed continued, free membership for those in the first (current members) list. It however requested re-submission of a paper containing re-arranged lists from pages 4 to 8, with further explanations on type

(educational/non-educational), size (local, regional, national), and analysis of the relations that existed with those bodies – including acceptable bodies based outside Wales; and clarification of what such bodies would receive for their membership.

9. Farewell to Dafydd Rhys

This was the last Council meeting for Dafydd Rhys as a staff governor, since his role of Welsh Medium and Democratic Engagement Co-ordinator within the Organisation was coming to an end on 30 September. He was thanked by the Chair and others for his governance contributions as a Council and committee member, for his commitment to the Organisation’s Welsh language work and to active participation by its membership. Warm wishes were expressed for his future.

10. Self-assessment of meeting’s proceedings by Council members

As there had been varied difficulties with broadband/Wi-Fi dependability, sound and vision challenges for 4 members during the meeting (including the Chair) and face-to-face meetings remained a distant prospect, it was mooted that AOC|ALW office locations with strong Public Sector Network Wi-Fi signals might be a future option for certain members to attend meetings (rather than at their homes). Toni Schiavone still felt it a priority to ensure that simultaneous interpretation was available for future Council gatherings.

11. Council meeting dates for 2020-21

Virtual events were anticipated, to be held as follows (normally with 12.30 pm start times):

- 2020 - Wednesday 25 November (N.B. 9.30 a.m. start time)
- 2021 - Monday 25 January
- Thursday 11 March
- Tuesday 30 March (AGM and Strategic Planning Day)
- Tuesday 18 May
- Thursday 27 July

ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 6	Chief Executive’s Report, September 2020	Council members would be invited to contribute to the Organisation’s response to the draft Tertiary Education and Research Bill (PCET).	KR / CH	Nov. 2020
		The Council agreed to an extension for the Senior Management Team Key Performance Indicators period to December 2020, with their review by the Council at its January 2021 meeting; and to them following a calendar year cycle in their operation from then onwards.	KR / MB / CH	Jan. 2021

Minute 8	Membership Report – list of Affiliated and Partner Organisations	The Council thanked officers for the submission of an interesting paper and happily confirmed continued, free membership for those in the first (current members) list. It however requested re-submission of a paper containing re-arranged lists from pages 4 to 8, with further explanations on type (educational/non-educational), size (local, regional, national), and analysis of the relations that existed with those bodies – including acceptable bodies based outside Wales; and clarification of what such bodies would receive for their membership.	ST / Michelle Kerswell	Nov. 2020
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