

COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business

12.30 p.m., Monday 4 July 2022

Held at multiple locations, via Zoom software

Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 13 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (Chair), Sonia Reynolds (Vice Chair), Jan Tiley, Tim Palazon, Stephen Nicholls, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Victory Ezeofor, Chris Franks, Sam Emmett, Salamatu Fada, Cathy Clark, Caroline Davies; Judith Evans and Siôn Aled Owen (to minute 5 only). The meeting was quorate throughout.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive); Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources) and Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum & Performance) - both to minute 11; Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Lynwen Davies (interpreter - simultaneous translation). Also Rhian Edwards (Deputy Director, FE & Apprenticeships Division, Welsh Government - minute 5 only).

Apologies: Marion Burke, Nicole Kinnaird, Dona Lewis.

2. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 17 March 2022 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous Council meeting, held via Zoom, were approved as a correct record. The three action points listed there had been acted upon. In order to strengthen the relationship between the Council and learners (minute 7), individual Council members were being invited to attend an on-line class: more would be contacted to schedule this for the coming academic year. Cathy Clark and Steve Nicholls had already observed a class apiece and both commended the quality of tutors in those sessions.

It was confirmed that four Council members had stepped down since the previous meeting - Toni Schiavone, Carl Hoskins, Gareth Cork and Steve David. Of those, two replacement staff governors had since been elected in the guise of Nicole Kinnaird and Sam Emmett. The latter was welcomed to his first Council meeting and introduced himself.

3. Chief Executive's Report, July 2022

Kathryn Robson spoke of a major return to face-to-face teaching, of the fact that 82% of the year's educational delivery target had been reached, and that the Organisation was working with all Ukrainian settlement locations within Wales with the assistance of its AMIF project staff. There were prospects for funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund and its Multiply (numeracy education) stream in Wales. While some scepticism was expressed of that Fund and its mechanism of money being made available to unitary authorities in Wales by Westminster/Whitehall without Welsh Government/Senedd overview, the opportunity to take advantage of some of the smaller (non-infrastructure) educational aspects of such funding should not be gainsaid. The Citizens' Curriculum for Wales was an exciting prospect as a pilot

programme too, which could help raise our profile. A question was asked about the proposed improvements to the Organisation's internal IT server hardware/file store system and the secureness of the new cloud-based services: with the support of JISC guidance it was believed that such virtualisation would be fully secure.

Thanks were again expressed for Council members' input to the 10 May Strategic Planning Day. Follow-up on its conclusions relating to branding issues and membership would be presented to the Council in the autumn. The Organisation would have a presence at the National Eisteddfod in Tregaron and Summer in the Park events in Swansea, but not at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show nor the Butetown Carnival. **The details of these public event appearances would be sent to Council members.**

4. Risk Register for July 2022

References to the Ukrainian conflict and to cost of living/inflation problems, as raised by the Council at its last meeting, had been added to the Register. It was thought that a separate mention of cost of living challenges created for learners would be useful. It was also pointed out that two actions/processes needed updating - in 1.1.1 the 'Model 3 consultation response' reference should come out; and in 6.1.1 the mention of working with the Open University in Wales on the Tudor Bowen Jones Fund should be removed as being obsolete.

5. Discussion with Rhian Edwards (Deputy Director, Further Education and Apprenticeship Division; Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning – Welsh Government)

Rhian Edwards had been in her post since May 2021, having previously worked for the Wales Co-operative Centre (now named 'Cwmpas'): so she had experience of third sector organisations. She was invited to provide an overview of the Government's commitment to adult community learning and the Organisation's possible position within it. **She used a slide presentation to make her key points: this would be shared with Council members by the Clerk after the meeting.**

She highlighted the Minister for Education's commitment to a Second Chance Nation which included priorities within adult education, and the importance of the Tertiary Education and Research Bill which would lead to the establishment of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. That Bill had six major innovations, including a new duty to fund lifelong learning. The Minister in policy speeches as well as in his practical undertakings had stated that this would involve a broader approach than merely qualification-oriented courses, and would be more cross-departmental than solely concentrating on education - encompassing health and well-being too, for example. An External Reference Group had been established of which Kathryn Robson was a member: she had chaired its previous meeting. While there was continuing commitment to maintaining current work there was also greater emphasis on the sector's civic mission, establishing a national charter for lifelong learning and a professional learning framework for all staff.

Multiply (see minute 3) was a major UK programme with £101 million allocated to Wales over 3 years. Rhian Edwards confirmed that it eroded devolution, as the Welsh Government was not involved in its funding distribution. While the UK's Department for Education would produce its own numeracy materials, there was also free rein for each local provider to create their own too.

In discussion and in answer to questions, it was stated that there would be a changed strategic picture in terms of re-alignment of funding between higher education and other parts of the post-16 scene, though it would be up to the Commission as an independent body to decide precisely how that happened. So Adult Learning Wales would in future have to make its case increasingly with the Commission for priority

and fair funding. Council members were pleased to know that there was potentially a move away from qualification-heavy learning, and that 'hooking' learners through other more varied means could be given greater emphasis. A Council member made a particular point that Covid-19 would undoubtedly, further down the line, make great demands on second chance education for many children who had studied during the past 2 years.

The Welsh Government was fully aware that the Commission's Board should have as broad a representation of stakeholders as possible, including those linked to community education, or to rural areas, and there might be changes in the structure and location of departments of the Welsh Government. While there was already a commitment to secure 'proper facilities' for specified education and training for eligible adults, there was no budget confirmed beyond 2024 for this field and the details were yet to be agreed.

The Council thanked Rhian Edwards for her informative input on this item, and she left the meeting.

6. Proposed budgets for 2022-23

These were recommended for approval by the Resources Committee. They were put together with the intention of managing risks while the transitional Covid-19 funding provided by the Welsh Government ended. Challenges for 2022-23 would include: smaller class sizes and higher room costs; the effect of inflation on utility costs and more; and the cost of living settlement's effect on salaries - each 1% rise in that would cost the Organisation c£56,000. The Learner Experience Committee had recently discussed possible problems caused by inflationary pressures for learners too.

The projections used were prudent, but did not leave much room for manoeuvre. It was positive that the Welsh Government had made a greater financial allowance for reductions in student numbers in classrooms. That was a separate consideration from cost of living contributions to be made by it - there was no offsetting expected from the Welsh Government in that respect. HMRC's travel expense mileage advisory rates were being monitored, so that tutors and other staff would benefit from any rate rise in them. **The Council approved the budgets for 2022-23 as submitted.**

7. Minutes of the AGM held on 8 April 2022

These were noted. Informal comments on the event had been positive in their feedback, and it was felt that the format of dividing the formal business and the 'Inspirational Women' session had worked well.

8. Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 20 June 2022

Steve Nicholls (Committee Chair) provided an overview of topics covered at the Committee meeting. Minute 5 on the current position regarding our two existing endowment funds, and the decision to move a further £1.5 million of cash surplus in three equal tranches to new investment holdings, was discussed. The ethical policies applied throughout by our investment managers, Brewin Dolphin, and the prudent approach to the transfer of the cash holdings were reassuring to the Council. On minute 11's reference to certain estates matters, it was asked whether there was regular enough review of the worth/future of the Coopers Yard, Cardiff site given the significant building redevelopment works in the surrounding area. It was clarified that the Organisation's estates strategy was monitored twice yearly by the Resources Committee. Given the application of agile working methods post-Covid-19 then Coopers Yard would naturally be included in regular reviews of office site use more generally. The minutes were noted.

9. Management Accounts for 1 August 2021 - 30 April 2022

The figures in this set of financial reports provided positive prospects for a surplus in the end of year forecasts. The possibility of reinstating a further £406,000 of Welsh Government funding, categorised as having been clawed back in the 2020-21 audited accounts, was a further potential plus in overall terms.

10. Report from the Learner Experience Committee meeting of 24 June 2022

Caroline Davies (Committee Chair) reported that this had been Jeremy Gass's final meeting as a co-opted member of the Committee. The Council wished to note formally its appreciation of his contribution to the Organisation and its predecessor bodies over so many years - as an employee, trustee, erstwhile Chair and overall wise counsel. Salamatu Fada had been made vice Chair of the Committee at the meeting. Evolution in curricula on offer in 2022-23, the positive nature of almost all feedback from learners, and the recommendations of the Black Leadership Group on racial diversity procedures within the Organisation had all been discussed.

11. Potential prolongation of Council member terms of office

Stephen Thomas provided an overview of the situation regarding continuity, cumulative experience and new trustees on the Council. 5 (of the current 17) Council members were due to reach their maximum six years of service at the same time and so step down at the end of March 2023, and there had been indications of difficulty in recruiting for certain Council vacancies over the previous two years. Hence there was a case for discussing openly the matter of governorship terms and possible revisions to the present set-up, especially as the constitution stipulated that an overall review of it was required by spring 2023 as part of its normal three-year cycle.

John Graystone - who admitted to an interest in this discussion, given that he was one of those whose term was up in 9 months' time - stated that he was generally against extensions of governance terms of office because of the positive nature of refreshing institutions and avoiding stagnation through regular turnover of individuals. However, he pointed out that certain further education colleges had 2 x 4 year stints as a norm, as did bodies such as Community Health Councils and other Welsh Government appointments. Some Council members saw that there was a case to be made for greater continuity in such a period of change: Covid-19 had disrupted so much, including the recruitment of paid staff, as well as the readiness of people to come forward to stand as local councillors or for voluntary roles such as those on the Council.

It was therefore legitimate to consider whether, as a one-off, there should be a re-consideration of time periods of service for governorship. Given the timetabled need for constitutional review, other suggestions could be considered too, for example: a reduction to one year (from the current two) of the period that someone had to be off the Council after serving a maximum term; the possibility of paying allowances to some/all Council members; and a new means of staggering the departure dates of Council members. **The Council asked the Clerk to prepare a timetable for the constitutional review and to re-consider the date of the AGM in 2023 so as better to coincide with any proposed changes that would come through.**

12. Self-assessment of meeting's proceedings by Council members and plans for future meetings

This first example of a blended/hybrid meeting - with 5 people together at the Coopers Yard office - was considered to have been successful and something with which the Council should continue. The technical aspects had worked, with assistance along the way from Sam Emmett, though the matter of simultaneous interpretation of inputs by those situated in the office for others present in the 'host' room needed resolution. The productive means by which the Council reached consensus on most matters was considered to be exemplary.

13. Council and public meeting dates for 2022-23

- Monday 26 September 2022
- Wednesday 30 November 2022
- January to March 2023: 2 Council meetings and an AGM (dates yet to be confirmed)
- Tuesday 16 May 2023 (Strategic Planning Day)
- Thursday 6 July 2023

ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 3	Chief Executive's Report, July 2022	The Organisation would have a presence at the National Eisteddfod in Tregaron, and Summer in the Park events in Swansea. The details of these public appearances would be sent to Council members.	ST	July 2022
Minute 5	Discussion with Rhian Edwards of the Welsh Government	A slide presentation was used to make the key points: this would be shared with Council members by the Clerk after the meeting.	ST	July 2022
Minute 11	Potential prolongation of Council member terms of office	The Council asked the Clerk to prepare a timetable for the constitutional review and to re-consider the date of the AGM in 2023 so as better to coincide with any proposed changes that would come through.	ST	September 2022