

CIRCULAR

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Academic Plan

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To: Heads of Welsh Higher Education Institutions, The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Advisory Group, Welsh-medium Provision Co-ordinators in the institutions, Heads of Further Education Institutions

Response by: 12pm 29 April 2016

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In September 2012 the Welsh Government's Education and Skills Minister launched the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's first Academic Plan. The plan was the result of consultation with the universities and wide-ranging discussion at the Coleg's Academic Board, and set the context for the process of academic planning which the Coleg would implement for the next period.

With the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's first period (2011-16) drawing to its close, and at a time of significant discussion regarding the Coleg's future development, drawing up a new Academic Plan is both timely and appropriate. The Academic Board has begun the process by initiating preliminary discussions in February 2016. The Coleg now invites responses from higher education institutions and other partners as part of the academic planning process, and has drawn up a series of questions to provide a frame for discussion. The higher education institutions are requested to consider the questions (which are presented as an appendix to this circular) and, should they wish, to submit any further comments or information. There will be a further opportunity to consult on details during the summer term.

The Coleg's plans for the future, including support for the new Academic Plan, will depend on the resources and budget allocated for the next few years. At present, this depends to a large degree on policy decisions made by the Welsh Government following the May elections. But despite the uncertainty which makes planning difficult, the Coleg is convinced of the need to proceed to prepare a new Plan, and it is our intention for it to be operational, at least in interim form, early in the 2016/17 academic year.

In the original Plan, the Coleg stated its mission. The new Plan will update the mission statement and will consider which elements need to be changed / developed. This declaration sets a framework for the plan in many respects, and any comments are welcome. Specifically, following the Hazelkorn report and the work carried out for the Diamond Review, we need to consider how appropriate the statement is in the context of the higher education sector (and possibly post-mandatory education) which is facing a period of considerable change. Specific paragraphs from 2012 are appended below to facilitate this:

'The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's core mission is the simple but powerful principle that every student has the right to Welsh-medium higher education of the highest quality.

Stating such a basic principle is a fairly easy matter – the challenge arises in creating an Academic Plan which puts that principle into operation.

The aim of this Plan is to outline how the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol intends to implement this principle. In so doing, we shall ensure that we simultaneously consider two elements of this core principle, namely the right to a Welsh-medium education and the need to ensure that this education is of the highest possible standard. We shall plan across the whole range of higher education provision, giving due attention to foundation degrees, undergraduate degrees, masters' degrees and postgraduate research degrees. If we are to embed Welsh-medium higher education for a generation or more, we must reflect the entire range and breadth of provision, rather than concentrating on some settings or disciplines only.

The Coleg Cymraeg has a national vision. Our intention is to strengthen existing provision and to develop new provision in new settings and /or disciplines. The objectives set out in this Plan are ambitious, but we commit also to working with all universities in Wales to make them a reality. We shall also be collaborating with other key partners to ensure the success of the Plan, including secondary schools, further education colleges and employers."

Appendix 1:

We welcome responses to the questions identified below, either individually or by theme.

Several themes suggest themselves, including:

- Sustainability of provision (4, 7, 9, 10)
- Scope of the Coleg's role (1, 15, 16)
- Developing collaboration (2, 5, 6)
- Resources (3)
- Academic Planning (8, 11, 12, 13, 14)

The questions are identified below, together with some context:

DISCUSSION POINT 1: Is the balance between the various types of higher education provision suitable? Should priority be given to specific types of higher education provision over the next period?

The focus was specifically on developing (full-time) undergraduate degrees. The Coleg's work in the field of postgraduate degrees has concentrated on the PhD programme. Developments on Masters level have been few and far between – indeed, some of the courses established under the Coleg's auspices have found it difficult to recruit students. Some of the foundation degree level provision has developed, but this has happened as departments / institutions recognised opportunities and collaborated with the Coleg to respond to those opportunities. There has been no significant development with short courses (see discussion point 15) with credits at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

DISCUSSION POINT 2: How much emphasis should be given on collaborative developments? What does the experience of the first years suggest as we consider developing further plans over the coming years?

A wide range of collaborative developments has taken place under the Coleg's auspices and leadership, but progress with collaborative modules / courses has been slower than expected. A number of different collaborative models have developed.

DISCUSSION POINT 3: How effective are the Coleg's educational resource platforms? How may they be developed / amended in future?

There has been significant growth in the collaborative resources available through the Coleg's e-learning platforms. This work has been successful in respect of the number of resources developed, but consideration needs to be given to the use made of these resources in teaching.

DISCUSSION POINT 4: In the current climate, what is sustainable provision? And what should be done in respect of those subjects where there is a clear demand for bilingual graduates but not so much student demand? (see also 10)

This section of the original Academic Plan focussed on ensuring sufficient staff and students (together with the institutional commitment) to ensuring the provision was sustainable. The original plan identifies the need for joint investment with universities in areas where there is a long tradition of Welsh-medium teaching, and suggests the staff and student numbers necessary to ensure sustainability. The Plan also refers to the need to consider carefully the settings where it is possible to study through the medium of Welsh.

Provision has certainly expanded substantially, but this development has occurred largely as a result of funding by the Coleg. Furthermore, it appears that some settings are finding it difficult to recruit sufficient numbers of students. This is a particular challenge as Coleg Cymraeg money to fund lectureships decreases over time or even comes to an end.

DISCUSSION POINT 5: Can the Coleg do more to develop a relationship with employers and society generally? Bearing in mind the scarcity of resources, should we concentrate on some specific sectors?

The Plan sets out the need to develop long-term relationships with employers and to develop graduates who possess the bilingual skills to enable them to contribute professionally to their areas of expertise. In this context, we can point to several notable successes:

- The Coleg's Work Experience Scheme which offers bilingual work placements to 150 students each year.
- The Coleg's Welsh Language Skills Certificate, with over 400 students annually having an opportunity to improve and prove their language skills

On a smaller level, effective partnerships have been developed with some key bodies, e.g., the Care Council, which in turn has led to partnership working on specific projects.

DISCUSSION POINT 6: Are there further changes / developments which could be considered in relation to the Coleg's partnership with students? Do students need to play a more prominent part in our processes for developing new provision?

The original Plan had a robust commitment to working in partnership with students when developing our schemes. Over the last few years, considerable developments have taken place in student representation within the Coleg, including:

- Observer on the Board of Directors
- More representatives on the Academic Board
- Tailored training for student representatives on Coleg committees
- Students to sit on Coleg subject panels

Despite this, student engagement with Coleg processes can vary greatly. The new Ambassadors Scheme also offers an opportunity to deepen our engagement with students.

DISCUSSION POINT 7: How to measure increase in student numbers? Is a benchmark of 40 credits a year sufficient? Do we need additional benchmarks, e.g., number studying for a full degree through the medium of Welsh?

The original plan identified the need to measure progress by taking into consideration the number of students studying at least 40 credits a year, how many were studying 80 credits a year and how many pursued their degree course entirely through the medium of Welsh. After the Academic Plan was agreed on, the Welsh Government targets changed to focus on students studying and least 5 credits a year in Welsh and those students studying at least 40 credits in Welsh. Following this change, the Coleg diligently monitored progress towards 5 credits a year and 40 credits a year. There has been no regular formal assessment of the numbers studying at least 80 credits a year, and the Coleg's subject schemes ensured that as many areas as possible attained the 40 credit threshold.

DISCUSSION POINT 8: How effective are the subject panels? Have the discussions on the Subject Development Schemes been constructive? How may the process be improved?

DISCUSSION POINT 9: How to deal with situations where a number of universities wish to offer a subject but where student numbers are low? What about a situation where a university does not wish to make provision – but where there are high numbers of students?

The Plan's intention was that each subject panel would draw up a Subject Development Plan following the themes and principles of the Academic Plan. This has largely been achieved, but the nature of the different panels' engagement with the Plan varied considerably. In some cases, discussions proved constructive and it was fairly easy to identify a way ahead. In other cases, there were considerable discussions, and there were some examples where it was agreed to include a large number of settings since there was no framework in place to deal with situations where a substantial number of universities wished to offer a subject (and receive the resources to do so).

DISCUSSION POINT 10: Are the benchmarks originally set for staff and student number still reasonable? What are the implications for settings not meeting these benchmarks?

There was an attempt in the Academic Plan to designate how many students and staff would be needed in each setting in order to make provision on different levels:

- Over 80 credits – at least 10 students every year and at least 4 members of staff
- Dros 40 credits – at least 6 students every year and at least 2 members of staff
- 'Small number subject' – a clear plan by one university including investment by the university and evidence of some form of demand

Generally, it is fair to say that the staff benchmarks have been met, but it is less apparent whether this is true of student numbers.

DISCUSSION POINT 11: Arts and Humanities. Is there a case for rationalisation of settings (or Coleg investment) in subjects taught at a number of settings? Are there lessons to be learned from experience in those fields that have proved challenging as regards numbers in the Arts and Humanities?

Subject planning in these areas has been slow on the whole. Across each of the areas, extensive provision is offered, and there are several examples of similar provision being offered in many settings.

There are some other subjects where numbers are fewer and where challenges have arisen. Across the Humanities, student numbers have remained high – although their choices of subject and setting have changed over time. The difficult but vital question remains – in what areas can it be argued that there is sufficient success and student demand to expect the universities to shoulder the entire financial burden?

DISCUSSION POINT 12: Social and Economic Sciences. Following on from successes in these areas, is there a case for re-assessing the support needed for each area in this subject cluster?

These areas have seen some progress. Plans were quickly agreed upon, and there were several early investments from the Staffing Scheme. Many areas have seen a considerable increase – as regards the number studying and also provision development.

DISCUSSION POINT 13: Health and Care Sciences. Should more be done in the areas of health and care, where there is obvious demand from the Government, but where progress in the universities is slow?

By 2016 it may be argued that significant progress had been made in the Health and Social Care provision. However, the progress has been fairly recent, and student demand does not fully reflect the available provision. The one area of traditional strength – Nursing at Bangor – has continued to grow. Social Work provision has been restored in Bangor. More recent developments in Nursing (across the south), Medicine (Cardiff and Swansea), Speech and Language Therapy (Cardiff Met), Midwifery (Swansea) are gradually establishing themselves, but student numbers are currently low. This is complicated by the fact that the provision is not always funded by HEFCW but rather through a Welsh Government commissioning process (WEDS)

DISCUSSION POINT 14: Science. How can the student market in these subjects be developed? Are there examples of good practice in successful subjects which can be replicated in other areas?

There has been specific investment in Science, with some prominent successes; but student numbers generally remain low, and on the whole, the number of students anxious to pursue a complete degree course through the medium of Welsh are low.

DISCUSSION POINT 15: What is the role of Further Education in the new Plan? Progression? FE/HE? Specific subject development in FE?

The original Academic Plan contains a passing reference to Further Education. It is increasingly apparent that Further Education colleges have an important role as a bridge into the world of Higher Education; but their role is much wider than this, with the move towards offering more higher education provision in Further Education colleges. Similarly, increasing further education provision at Level 3 is important in encouraging progression and increasing demand from students who at present switch the medium of instruction when moving to post-16 education.

DISCUSSION POINT 16: Is there room for workplace post-qualification education [chiefly postgraduate but may be undergraduate] in the Academic Plan?

Short courses (undergraduate or postgraduate) are largely absent from the Plan. Is there a place to discuss developing (part-time) accredited Higher Education courses which might perhaps be offered in the workplace?

Responses are requested to this circular by midday on 29 April 2016. Any enquiries should be initially referred to the Coleg Registrar, Dr Dafydd Trystan d.trystan@colegcymraeg.ac.uk