

Dear Webmaster,

As President and Chair of Council of Lampeter University I would like to respond to the open letter from Bob Fonow. The Vice Chancellor has responded to many aspects of Bob's letter but I would particularly like to add some comments concerning Council about which Bob is very disparaging having the disadvantage of never having met members of Council!

There is much in Bob's letter which would find echoes in the views of members of Council but he is considerably wide of the mark in a number of respects and out of date in his understanding of developments. It is very encouraging to observe the commitment of alumni to the continued success of the university and we must progress by working together.

Firstly, we need to remember the environment in which universities now have to operate. Government funding support for universities has been eroding over recent years and now stands at about half the level, in comparative terms, of twenty five years ago. The Welsh Assembly Government has set out a strategy linking funding support to its own agenda based upon 'reconfiguration' (including possible mergers and collaboration), widening access to less advantaged students and working with the business sector. Increasingly, funding comes with strings attached and a great deal of management energy must be devoted to trying to meet government demands to comply with their agenda. While retaining their legal independence, universities are faced with more and more intervention by government so that they cannot simply concentrate on their own priorities.

Changes in the government funding of students, the introduction of student fees and the uncertainty over the possible introduction of 'top up fees' in Wales have distorted the market. Partly for economic reasons, an increasing number of students elect to study on a part time basis or by distance learning and the growth of new technology has paved the way for the use of the internet to support study. Students in 26 countries currently study Welsh at Lampeter through the internet. Students increasingly expect to be able to study where they want, when they want and in the way they want. The era of discerning students, as paying customers making considerable financial investment (and incurring substantial debts) is well and truly with us. In a very competitive market, universities must respond to the current realities if they are to continue to succeed.

Against such a demanding background the University of Wales, Lampeter can take credit for the fact that we now have more full time equivalent students than ever before and the financial position is improving with every expectation of a modest trading surplus next year. With a recently appointed marketing and recruitment officer reporting directly to the Vice Chancellor we are seeing a fresh impetus to our efforts and further increasing the number of students can only be achieved by exceeding the funded student numbers supported by the Welsh Assembly Government. There is no room for complacency and we need to continue to improve in this vital area.

Robert Pearce was appointed as Vice Chancellor some ten months ago and has proved to be a breath of fresh air. With the support of Council, he is putting in place a number of much needed improvements. We have a new strategic plan, including clear aims

and targets which charts the way forward. This plan will be supported over the next few months by up dated plans for IT, Human Resources, Finance, Estates etc together with related departmental plans. This has been a difficult exercise and Robert has taken time to ensure comprehensive consultation with staff and the Council.

The appointment of a professionally qualified Director of Finance and Resources to take responsibility for finance, estates and catering is an important step forward with the post capable of further expansion in the future. A new Dean of Academic Studies has replaced two posts as Heads of School with the move towards a single school structure. We now have a slimmer, more closely focused senior management team to support the Vice Chancellor. In making these changes, Council hopes that this will strengthen the leadership of the university staff.

Over the two years I have been President we have completely restructured the Council and this has been held up as an example to other universities in the Lambert report. The number of Councillors has been reduced and we have appointed members with highly relevant experience. We have members with skills and experience in public and private sector management, marketing, strategic planning, human resource management, finance, IT, media and the private school sector. Members have had considerable experience of change in other organisations and are very determined to hold the university to account. There are committees for Finance (Chaired by a former Treasurer at a large local authority), Audit, Strategy and Performance. Members also sit on other university committees such as IT and Health and Safety. Council and the Committees meet five times a year and members are also involved in a number of informal activities. Each member is linked to a particular department in which they have relevant expertise or interest. They visit the department regularly and discuss progress with staff so that they are better able to contribute to Council meetings dealing with relevant issues. We do not have any retired gentleman farmers!!

On a personal level, I have more than forty years experience of public service including more than ten years leading the highest performing police service in the country. I am a Companion of the Chartered Institute of Management. I am in frequent contact, at least weekly, with the university through meetings, personal visits or e-mail.

I doubt that anyone could fairly charge that Council is supine. Indeed, some members of the university staff sometimes have difficulty in keeping up (!) and feel that we are both challenging and demanding.

Bob Fonow addresses the question of fundraising and suggests that we have delayed implementation of a fundraising programme. In truth, in the time I have served on the Council, the subject has not been discussed. I believe that the view was that this would not be supported by alumni. I am sure that Council would be more than ready to consider any viable proposal for fundraising but would wish to proceed in a way which is acceptable to alumni. I will certainly raise this topic for discussion by Council.

Finally, I would like to say that Council and the Vice Chancellor are very keen to support and work with alumni. Both the Vice Chancellor and myself have supported meetings and re-unions of the Lampeter Society and will do everything we can to further co-operation. We very much appreciate the support of alumni and believe that

it is vital that we work together for the benefit of the university. Whatever may have been the deficiencies of support in the past, I do believe that the situation has improved considerably and we are open to any suggestions for further ways in which we can go forward together.

Ray White, CBE, QPM, CCMI
President