

Dear Stuart,

I should like to make a few comments in response to Bob Fonow's latest letter. I am sorry not to have been able to reply earlier but I have been away visiting relatives on the Isle of Wight.

The Vice Chancellor has explained the deficiencies of the Guardian league table. I hope that the representations of Vice Chancellors in Wales will persuade the Guardian to produce a fairer system. However, being last in any league table is not acceptable for Lampeter.

Fortunately there is much better news. The new edition of the well respected Sunday Times University Guide places Lampeter at 56 out of 115 universities in the league table, a commendable improvement of six places on last year. If we go on improving at that rate we will soon be top! This position contrasts with many other universities such as Aberystwyth (down 2 places) and Cardiff (down 5 places to 21st). Overall, Lampeter was placed fifth of the Welsh universities. As you would expect, there are aspects of the assessment where improvement is needed but the result is very encouraging and reflects the excellent efforts of staff and students (and even Council!) operating in the most challenging environment which I explained in my last message. I hope that members of the 16 Club Returners would join me in congratulating them on their efforts.

On the need for international leadership with the highest ethical standards, expressed by Bob, I could not agree more. The breakdown in trust between the public and leading politicians and the growing unwillingness to accept advice from government 'experts' is very serious. I have always believed in the need for leaders with the very highest ethical standards and an awareness of the need for high quality service. Lampeter obviously cannot solve the world's problems alone but should certainly play its part in encouraging and developing students with high personal standards and a sound background in the liberal arts.

Bob mentioned meeting 'grumbling staff and crumbling facilities' on his last visit. It has been my observation that there is currently a morale problem among some members of Higher Education staff generally throughout the sector. There is a perception of poor job security and salary levels which have fallen behind comparable employees. There has been a recent national salary agreement which would improve the situation but there are significant problems over affordability within the current limited government funding. Ultimately, pay and conditions can only be provided within a sector which is consistently successful and receiving adequate government support. In my previous message I touched on some of the overall problems of the sector and I believe that this contributes to the poor satisfaction levels of some staff. As far as Lampeter is concerned, I believe that consultation and communication has been much improved. A part time Personnel specialist has now been added to the staff and this should help to address some of the problems. The need now is for all staff to demonstrate the strong commitment of most and give the Vice Chancellor 100% support in taking the institution forward.

As far as facilities are concerned, I would be the first to agree that the campus needs improving and this will be addressed by the new Director of Finance and Resources. £1m has recently been invested in developing Lloyd Thomas Hall to provide excellent facilities. We now have a large number of rooms with the ensuite facilities increasingly expected by students and all student rooms have now been provided with direct computer links. The university has invested in much better IT provision with a number of additional workstations available to students. There will need to be an ongoing programme of improvements as investment becomes available.

We have already decided to include details of each member of Council on the university website and there will be a display board with photographs of the members and brief details in the Old Building. We have very well qualified members of Council, willing and able to contribute to the university. The individual links with departments can be developed and I hope that the university will take full advantage of the potential of Council members. The draft Strategic Plan has already been published on the university intranet and should be available through the website once it has been finalized shortly.

As far as marketing goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating in that more students are being recruited than the Welsh Assembly will fund but I accept that other aspects of marketing including overcoming negative perceptions developed, in some quarters, over the years will require a sustained effort to overcome. There is excellent professional expertise within Council which will be able to assist in this effort particularly through a newly appointed member who will be linked to the Marketing and Recruitment Department. If you look at the website and at some of the recent recruiting documentation I think that there are encouraging signs of improvement.

In Bob's point about the student mix, I would also like to see a broad spread of students from various backgrounds. To some extent this is the current situation but staff now have the additional pressure of supporting a considerable number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I would hope that we can attract more very well qualified applicants. As part of our efforts to liaise with sixth form colleges, our links with public schools have been enhanced with one public school headmaster recently joining Council and with close co-operation, including my presenting the end of year prizes, with another public school within Wales.

Finally, Council will be discussing fundraising at our next meeting and I hope that some positive action will result. It would help Council, in seeing the best way forward, to know whether or not fundraising efforts would receive the support of alumni generally. Devoting scarce time and effort to fundraising could only be justified if it results in substantial benefits and this could only take place with full support from alumni. Perhaps members might wish to indicate their views through this website.

If I can summarise my views generally. We are beginning to see progress but there is a long way to go and we are operating against a very difficult, largely government created, environment. The Vice Chancellor and his staff need strong support and encouragement if Lampeter is to develop on a long term viable basis. The constructive support of alumni is very much appreciated. It is essential that we continue to work together for the benefit of the university.

Ray White, CBE, QPM, CICM, President