

Vice Chancellor's Toast to the Lampeter Society at the Annual Reunion, Saturday 17th July 2004

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have been given a brief for my address tonight. I was told that the VC will combine wit, a few facts on the University, comments on the brilliance of the Lampeter Society and its huge contribution to the well being of the place, and rounding off with a toast.

The reference to wit is perhaps an allusion to a comment I think I made at the Lampeter Society London Branch dinner in May. A Vice Chancellor was asked if he could provide a speaker for a dinner, preferably a wit. He replied to say that he could not provide a wit, but he could offer two half-wits, if that would do instead. Of course, it would be impossible to make such an offer from amongst my colleagues at Lampeter.

I could, perhaps, make the comment about another institution with which we are proposing to open a new learning centre in Pembroke Dock. According to the papers which were drawn up by the other college, an advantage of the venture is that it will offer new opportunities for higher education "in an area of multiple deprivation."

Playing with words can be fun. My daughter completed her studies in medicine this year. She hasn't made up her mind what she should specialise in, but one web site suggests that if she were short tempered, pediatrics could be a good choice since pediatricians are doctors with little patients. Her husband has also recently qualified as a doctor. If he became a psychiatrist, and she moved into obstetrics, then they could do a useful combined operation in odds and ends.

Of course, Wales has its own repertoire of stories. I attended a dinner recently where I heard two tales about schoolboys who arrived late. One apologised because his Mam had got burnt that morning. "Nothing too serious, I hope", said the teacher. The boy responded, "They don't mess around in the crematorium".

The other school pupil told the teacher that he had had to take the cow to the bull that morning. "Couldn't your Dad do it", said the teacher? "Oh, no", said the boy, "me Mam said it had to be the bull or nothing".

A colleague has said that staff at Lampeter fall into two camps: those who opt almost at once to join the escape committee and those so in love with the place that they find it hard to leave. I fall into the latter camp, and so, I am sure, at least emotionally, so do you. Bill Fillery in Chapel this morning described his recent voyage of return to a place which clearly has a very important spot in his heart. I am sure he was expressing sentiments which you would all share. One of the things I have found about Lampeter is the huge loyalty and commitment which people show to the place. That is a commitment which is reflected in the activities of the Lampeter Society.

Some of you may have seen the open letter which Bob Fonow has posted on the 16 Club Website. It is a letter which I would strongly recommend you all to read. Although there are a significant number of inaccuracies in it, there is a great deal in what Bob says with which I agree.

Bob describes an institution in crisis. Lampeter came bottom of the Guardian league tables in place 119. He says “We will hear from the Lampeter administration that other newspapers and magazines rate Lampeter a bit higher, or that rankings don’t mean much, or that they are unfair.” I am happy to oblige. What he says is true. The rankings are unfair. You will find that the bottom ten in the list contains four institutions in Wales (Trinity College, University of Wales, Newport, North East Wales Institute, as well as Lampeter). Swansea Institute scrapes in at position 109, 11 from the bottom. Only one institution in Wales does not appear in the bottom half of the league tables, and that is Cardiff University, which only just manages to beat East London, Westminster and Bournemouth into 36th place.

Rank	Institution
36	Cardiff University
71	University of Wales, Aberystwyth
72	University of Wales, Swansea
78	University of Wales, Bangor
96	University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
97	University of Glamorgan
109	Swansea Institute
112	Trinity College Carmarthen
114	University of Wales, Newport
115	North East Wales Institute
119	University of Wales, Lampeter

Why do Welsh institutions fare so badly? The answer is simple. The biggest single factor in *The Guardian* league tables is the score in teaching quality assessments (the TQA score). Wales did not operate the same teaching quality assessment system as England, and scores were not awarded. This factor was worth 22% of the overall ranking. Welsh institutions have been running a race where they have only three legs to English Universities’ four. That is not fair.

Where I might disappoint Bob (at least in one sense) is that I will not say that Lampeter’s position in the league tables does not matter. It does matter, and we have to do something about it. And there are things that we can do.

Apart from TQA scores, other factors used in *The Guardian* league tables are student entry qualifications (15%), graduate employment rates (15%), staff/student ratios (15%), library spending (15%), degree results compared with admissions qualifications (10%), and inclusiveness (8%). Other league tables use similar factors, although frequently with different weightings, and some include additional or alternative factors, such as scores in research assessment and completion rates.

In the first three categories I have listed (entry qualifications, graduate employment, and staff/student ratios), Lampeter does not do well. This is partly because of our subject mix; the demand for our subjects is weaker than for most universities, so we get less well qualified applicants; students in the humanities tend to take longer to get their first jobs; and although we spend a high proportion of our funds on staff, and have an average administrative cost per student significantly below the average for

Wales, the funding for our mix of subjects is far inferior to funding for science subjects, so we can employ fewer staff per student.

Those are the excuses. But this is what we can do. This year and last year we recruited more students than the Welsh Assembly Government gives us money to teach. This is a deliberate strategy. For a number of years Lampeter failed to meet its recruitment targets. In consequence its income suffered. We do not want to return to that position. The market in higher education is extremely volatile, there are danger signs on the horizon for Wales as a consequence of failings in the federal University of Wales to keep abreast of the current educational agenda, and the introduction of top-up fees will have unpredictable consequences. The University needs a safety margin and it needs to re-establish credibility in its ability to attract students. However, once the University has achieved those objectives, it can afford to begin to become more selective in its recruitment policy. Entry qualifications should rise, although we need to be alert to the social role which we play in offering educational opportunity to redress social disadvantage

Even taking into account the mix of subjects at Lampeter, our employability figures are not acceptable, and as students are expected to make increasing contributions to the costs of their own study, this is likely to become an increasingly important factor. We have therefore taken steps to incorporate skills and personal development planning elements into our undergraduate degree programmes which will form an assessed part of the curriculum. We will consider ways of extending the support which we can offer to our graduates in finding jobs once they have left, and we are combining in one location our employability and student support units.

Some areas may be a little more difficult to tackle, but it is not impossible. Our ability to recruit more staff per student is constrained by the relatively low level of funding the WAG gives us per student. However, we are able to charge significantly higher fees for international students, and we are seeing a significant increase in the number of such students at the University. That will help to increase the average level of funding per student. We intend to increase the level of funding per student still further through reviewing our policy on tuition fees. The fees charged at Lampeter for international students are at the lower end of the bottom quartile when compared with the fees charged by other universities in Britain. We intend to raise our fee levels progressively to bring them closer to the UK median, and we will still be offering good value for money. Similarly, a very high proportion of our students are not expected to make a personal contribution towards the cost of their study. If all of our students contributed at the maximum rate allowed, it would increase our revenue from teaching by a small but significant percentage (of the order of 6%). As our pattern of recruitment permits, we need to increase the contribution from student fees, and again we are taking the first steps towards this in 2004/2005.

I have spent quite a bit of time on league tables, but Bob Fonow raises many other issues. I cannot spend so much time on them. He advocates a division of management responsibilities with a separation between business and academic affairs. That structure will, effectively, be in place from 1 September. Gwynne Jones retires as Bursar this summer. He is being replaced by a Director of Finance and Resources who will initially be responsible for finance, estates, and catering and hospitality, and may in due course acquire other tasks such as personnel. Academic affairs are the

responsibility of the Pro-Vice Chancellor, who is responsible for academic support (library, student support and careers) and the academic framework with a single Dean who is responsible for academic development. With the top level structures now in place, over the next year we shall need to concentrate upon middle management levels, with job evaluations and training to ensure that we achieve greater effectiveness and greater efficiency. Moving faster on restructuring has been delayed by a financial position which emerged as worse when I had taken over from Keith Robbins in October last year than the Council and Senior Management had thought was the case earlier in the summer. I am pleased to report that we have made significant advances in the finances, with a reduction in staffing of some ten posts over the course of the last year. The costs of early retirements will result in an increased deficit for the current financial year (2003/2004), but we are aiming for a small surplus in the coming financial year, with increasing surpluses in subsequent years.

The University's Council has been playing a full part in helping to develop the University's strategy. Bob sets up and demolishes the Aunt Sally of a Council consisting of a bunch of retired luminaries or gentlemen farmers meeting to rubber stamp decisions every six months over a congenial lunch. That is not what our Council is like – it is composed of articulate and demanding individuals with substantial and relevant experience in most of the areas which the University needs. If anything, it has been suggested, the members of Council are too demanding. Bob should meet them.

I come to two final matters. The first of these is fundraising. Bob says that he has argued for ten years that Lampeter ought to be actively engaged in fundraising, but has met with a blank stare. I have to admit that I had not seen fundraising as a first priority. We have first to get Lampeter running effectively as an educational enterprise. Lampeter has a small but significant endowment. But it only generates a contribution to our general revenue of less than one percent of our total revenue. To bring the contribution to the 30% or so which is typical of ancient United States educational foundations would require our general endowment to be increased by around £50million. That is not a credible target, but every little helps, and I have already indicated to Council that fundraising needs to move up our list of priorities. Over the last year or so, the University has already benefited from two very generous legacies. It received around £650,000 from the estate of Anthony Dyson. The bequest was subject to some rather restrictive conditions, but we have reached agreement with the executors as to ways in which the income can be spent to comply with the terms of the bequest whilst achieving real benefits for the University through three undergraduate scholarships in history, and annual lectures in history and poetry which will help to develop scholarship. The University will also be receiving a smaller but still important bequest from the estate of the late Peter Allison. Leaving a bequest to the University is a relatively painless way of giving, especially since the extraordinary inflation in house prices and increased longevity mean that most of us are now worth more on our death than might have been the case a few decades ago, and our relatives are less in need of our support. Bequests have been of enormous value to the University over the years, and I do hope that all of you will give it consideration.

Finally, there is the question of focus and marketing. We have been engaged this year in consultation with all staff and with Council over the University's future direction.

A phrase which was used in a planning document a couple of years ago, but which had not been developed, has caught the imagination. It is that the University cannot aspire to be all things to all people, but it can aspire to being Britain's Foremost Liberal Arts University. That reflects the foundations upon which the University was first established, namely to provide a broad based education to those preparing for profession in the church, but it remains just as relevant today. We have identified five key features:

- Strong academic traditions
- Enterprising and dynamic
- An education for life
- A supportive and caring community
- An enriching and beautiful environment

We are doing reasonably well in all of these areas, but we all recognise that we are still not doing well enough. Our vision represents an aspiration which will help to drive our development, but which will help us to stand out – positively – in a crowded higher education marketplace.

Bob Fonow expresses it eloquently:

“What are we marketing at Lampeter? The key marketing message is that Lampeter is an historic small university college with an illustrious past and vibrant future. Lampeter graduates are educated to be ethically responsible citizens, prepared to make a contribution to the improvement of society. Lampeter graduates are found in the highest reaches of government, business and the professions around the world. The college is steeped in its history, which encompasses a disciplined approach to degree studies in an open academic and lively social environment. We are a secular institution today but proud of our historic connection to the Church, which still influences the spirit of Lampeter, where all can feel accepted and comfortable regardless of race, religion, politics, sex or eccentricities. In a complex and confusing world Lampeter offers an excellent liberal arts education and a path toward values that will help students contribute to the world around them effectively and morally – while making a good living. You are a Lampeter man or woman for life – part of something historic and special, available only to the very few.”

That brings me, at last, to the Lampeter Society. The Society does not represent all of our graduates, but I want to see it representing more. However, the Society is likely to include those who are most committed to the University and who will work most actively to support us. That is a resource which I treasure, not just because you might give us money – although I hope you will – but because there is so much more that you can do. Your presence here is an affirmation of an important continuing link. Some of you may be able to offer our graduates employment. All of you can speak well of the University and recommend it as a place of study to prospective students. You can provide us with advice and guidance, and indeed I hope that we will always have at least one of our own graduates on our Council. You may even return to us for further study, and I have to say that age is no obstacle – we have students in their seventies and eighties.

But I am the first to recognise that my requests of you bring responsibilities on our part. We cannot expect you to give us help unless we give you something in return, and I am pleased that Jane Norris-Hill has been able to liaise with officers more effectively than I am sure was the case before her appointment to her current role. We know that you need more communication from us. We are committed to providing it. We know that staff involvement in alumni events is important. We shall work on it. We shall work to foster better links with the Lampeter Society. Because you're worth it.

Ladies and gentlemen: I ask you to rise and to raise your glasses to The Lampeter Society.