

Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB)

Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB) is located in Wales House, Brussels. The office was launched in March 2006 and expanded in 2008 to employ three staff. WHEB is a partnership, established with the support of Welsh Higher Education Institutions, Higher Education Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The key aim of WHEB is to maximise the benefits to the Welsh Higher Education (HE) sector of engaging with wider Europe, by adding value to existing capacity and service provision in Brussels.

In pursuit of this aim, WHEB:

- Assists the Welsh HE sector to build strategic relationships with wider European and Bologna country partners
- Enables the Welsh HE sector to engage more fully with stakeholders, institutions, and processes in Brussels, including the Lisbon/Jobs & Growth Agenda of the EU
- Briefs the EU on the priorities of Welsh HE
- Proactively identifies EU funding opportunities and enables the development of EU and Bologna-related projects and initiatives for Welsh Higher Education Institutions
- Raises the profile of Welsh HE in Europe

WHEB delivers these objectives by grouping its activities under three priorities. It gathers and disseminates intelligence and relevant information to the Welsh HE sector. It contributes to the promotion of Welsh Higher Education Institutions throughout Europe, in particular through hosting events in Wales House, Brussels that involve key European actors. Finally, the organisation facilitates and coordinates activity designed to achieve its objectives, harnessing the networking opportunities available with public and private sector actors that are represented and have influence in Brussels.

WHEB works with networks in Brussels that have a strong profile with policy-makers and are sources of potential transnational partnerships. These include:

- European Regions Research and Innovation Network in Brussels (ERRIN)
- European Policy Centre Innovation Task Force
- Brussels Informal Network for Education and Training (BINET)
- European Association of Regional Development Agencies (EURADA)
- UK Regions Brussels Offices Group (UKBO)

In the UK, WHEB also has an ongoing dialogue with:

- UK HE Europe Unit
- British Council Wales
- Higher Education Academy (through its Senior Advisor for Wales)



Wales House, Brussels in front of the EU Council of Ministers building.



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Addysg Uwch Cymru Brwsel
Welsh Higher Education Brussels

Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB) Annual Report 2007-8

This report describes the second operational year of WHEB, some highlights of which are described below.

During this academic year, the Higher Education Wales Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (Rectors) met with the EU Commissioners for Research and Education. As a result, the European Commission contacted WHEB to offer the sector a funded place at its European University-Business Forum on Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. This was an invitation-only workshop to develop policy. The draft European Lifelong Learning Charter for universities was also presented, which EU Ministers will sign in the autumn.

The first WHEB paper of knowledge transfer case studies, developed with the sector, has resulted in new links with higher education institutions in Europe. Staff from two Welsh universities presented at a seminar in Paris on Enterprise-University Partnership in Doctoral Education organised by the UNICA network of universities in European capital cities. The European Centre for the Strategic Management of Universities (ESMU) also asked WHEB to present on knowledge transfer to a group of Vice-Rectors from a Russian university.

At each of this year's WHEB seminars in Brussels on eLearning and innovation, a participant from a Welsh Higher Education Institution (HEI) gained an additional European partner with whom a funding application was later submitted. The managers of a university-based EQUAL project presented to EU Member State officials on access and social inclusion in lifelong learning. A meeting for a Welsh Business School with the Brussels representative of a leading French institution has led to both receiving EU funding for a project on entrepreneurship.

In the coming twelve months, WHEB will strengthen relationships with key European partners under the broad headings of wellbeing and entrepreneurship/creativity. The internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) and related EU funding will also be a focus, in addition to continued support to HEIs for their current and planned European activities.

Gathering and disseminating intelligence to the Welsh higher education sector

- WHEB arranged for a European Commission official to speak on the new Eco-Innovation programme, as part of a Welsh Assembly Government Wales European Forum in Swansea. The event was introduced by the First Minister for Wales and attended by sixteen staff from Welsh higher education, plus the Wales Energy Research Centre.
- WHEB provided a written briefing to the sector on support available for outgoing Erasmus placements and intelligence on the likely shape of the Erasmus Mundus programme for international joint Masters & PhDs. This was mainly based on attendance at two Bologna Process seminars in Belgium and included consultation with British Council Wales (Erasmus National Agency).
- WHEB hosted a meeting for the Brussels representatives of regions and companies recognised as exemplary by the European Commission in ICT Assisted Living. Participants agreed to prepare an expert round-table in Brussels to foster contacts between European experts and officials managing relevant EU funding programmes.
- WHEB circulated a schedule of EU transnational calls for proposals planned in 2008 to Welsh HEI European Officers. This was designed to enable potential applicants to undertake preparatory work (e.g. meetings in Brussels) in order to maximise their chances of success.



Meeting room in Wales House.

Promoting Welsh HEIs throughout Europe

- The WHEB paper of knowledge transfer case studies was mailed to around one hundred selected European officials, networks and regions. The deputy head of the EU Research Commissioner's office sent a letter noting the paper with interest. The paper can be downloaded from the European Commission's webpage of examples of university-business cooperation: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/business/example_en.html.

- WHEB held its annual conference on sport, higher education and skills as part of the St David's Day celebrations in Brussels. Speakers included a European Commission official working on sports policy and a lecturer from Turin University on the institution's interaction with the Olympic Games. Following the seminar, an exhibition of photography related to sport from Welsh HEIs was launched, where (former) students spoke about their work. Documents from the event are available at <http://www.wheb.ac.uk/en/news.php>.
- WHEB jointly organised the multi-agency conference 'The competitive advantages for Welsh HEIs of engagement with the Bologna Process' in Cardiff, Wales. Every Welsh higher education institution sent a senior representative. The heads of two influential European higher education networks spoke at the conference. The discussion amongst participants recommended highlighting the study & work placements that universities can offer within Europe to learners, graduates and employers. Documents from the event are available at <http://www.wheb.ac.uk/en/news.php>.
- The EQUAL project 'Gaining Work, Learning and Advice in Rural Areas - GWLAD' was promoted by Bangor University School of Lifelong Learning on the Wales stand during the OPEN DAYS exhibition of regions and cities in Brussels.

2008-9 Priorities

WHEB will continue in its third year to support higher education in Wales to identify and engage in current and forthcoming European opportunities. Planned activities include:

- Consulting with existing and additional contacts in Welsh higher education to develop new networking opportunities in Brussels
- Particular focus on entrepreneurship/creativity and wellbeing (especially children, older people, mental health)
- Engaging with current and future EU funding relevant to higher education, in particular in support of trans-national mobility, curriculum development and research.
- Identifying and working intensively with selected organisations based in Brussels, in order to create opportunities for the experts that we represent to collaborate
- Tracking the debate on the future strategy and budget of the EU and other European cooperation processes.
- Responding to the requests of Welsh higher education staff for European information and contacts

Facilitating and coordinating activity

- WHEB assisted HEW and HEFCW to shape the UK HE Europe Unit response to the consultation on EU structural funds after 2013. This was based on an invitation to attend the Cohesion Forum in Brussels in September, which included a speech from the First Minister. Following discussion with colleagues in Wales, WHEB responded to the consultation on the future of the EU budget after 2013. This can be downloaded at http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/library/contributions/o/20080409_O_10_en.pdf.
- WHEB has updated the sector on the latest and prospective guidance from the European Commission on exploiting the synergies between FP7 and the structural funds. The official who prepared the Practical Guide to EU funding opportunities for research, development and innovation spoke at the Welsh Industrial Liaison Officers seminar in Brussels in February 2008.
- WHEB staff participated in six meetings with heads of department in Welsh higher education institutions, including music, education, business school, textiles/fashion, and transport economics. WHEB has since created or identified European networking opportunities in these areas.
- WHEB hosted a Brussels networking forum for eLearning practitioners. The event was chaired by the Senior Advisor for Wales of the Higher Education Academy, and keynote speeches were provided by the European Foundation for Management Development and the European Students Union. Around fifty practitioners attended from eleven European countries.
- WHEB researched and wrote reports in response to over 25 substantive European enquiries from the Welsh HE sector. Meeting programmes in Brussels for about a dozen delegations from Welsh HE (known as study visits) were also arranged. Welsh universities also used the meeting room in Wales House, Brussels for meetings and conferences.



Higher Education Wales Committee and EU Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik meet in Cardiff November 2007 (Photo courtesy of the European Commission office in Wales).