

**Tom Middlehurst AM**

Assembly Secretary for Education and Training  
Ysgrifennydd y Cynulliad dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant



Ysgrifennydd y Cynulliad · Assembly Secretary  
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru  
The National Assembly for Wales

Our Ref: SF/00-2594

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Dr L E Williams  
Secretary to the Council  
University of Wales  
University Registry  
King Edward VII Avenue  
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17 April 2000

*Re Dr. Williams*

Thank you for your letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> March which has been sent to all members of the National Assembly for Wales, including the First Secretary, outlining the concerns of the Council and Academic Board of the University of Wales in respect of the Assembly's handling of the recent allegations at the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI).

I note that you are concerned at the way the Assembly has dealt with this matter. I was faced with a number of accusations about the running of NEWI brought to my attention by responsible people holding public positions and also from members of the public. The allegations passed to me ranged far more widely than academic irregularities. The accusations covered:

- bullying, harassment, and victimisation;
- human resource policy issues;
- financial mismanagement;
- failure to meet business objectives; and, as you are aware,
- validation and assessment irregularities.

I recognise that higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and that normally I would hope that their internal procedures would be more than adequate for effectively dealing with complaints. But in this instance, there was a strong suggestion that confidence had broken down in the way NEWI's procedures were being operated and many of the allegations were levelled at the Institute's senior management. Because of this and also because substantial sums of public money go to NEWI, I felt it was important that the matters should be properly investigated. In all these circumstances, I decided

that it would be appropriate for the Funding Council to investigate these matters. I want to emphasise that this is an independent investigation and the National Assembly has not taken any direct role in the investigation. In this instance, I remain of the view that this is the best way of dealing with the issues in a way which will be fair and will command respect in Wales.

I understand that the investigation by the University of Wales into those allegations relating to validation arrangements, which represents a relatively small but important part of the overall investigation, was conducted at the request of the Funding Council. The University's report will be taken into account by the Council's officers alongside all the other evidence presently being compiled regarding the full range of allegations.

With respect to the University's report, I note your observation that the allegations investigated by the University have been found to be without substance. I understand, however, that the Council's officers have continuing concerns relating to several aspects of the University's report and have recently written to the University's Validation Officer seeking further clarification and additional evidence. The University's response has been received in the past couple of days and is presently under consideration by the Council.

Copies of this letter go to the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales, the Chairman of the Assembly's Post-16 Education and Training Committee, the Assembly's Librarian and to the Chief Executive of the Welsh Funding Councils.

Yours sincerely  
Iain H. Williams