



THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES
CYMDEITHAS DDYSGEDIG CYMRU

President's Annual Address

Sir Emyr Jones Parry GCMG FInstP PLSW

20 May 2015



Cymrodyr, annwyl gyfeillion, Fellows, Friends...Croeso eto i'r cyfarfod arbennig o Gymdeithas Ddysgedig Cymru. A very warm welcome to you all to this, the fifth annual congregation of the Learned Society of Wales. My particular congratulations to all the newly-elected Fellows.

Looking back, the founding parents can be very content with the many achievements of the Society in five years. Special thanks are due to Sir John Cadogan, the first President and to Dr Lynn Williams, who was first the midwife and then the founding Executive Secretary of the Society.

It is right that I recognise and thank the Officers and Council of the Society for their work over the year. We owe a debt to all those who have contributed to our activities, particularly to the members of the panels who scrutinised nominations and proposed the rich field, now elected as Fellows.

I would like to welcome Professor Peter Halligan as Chief Executive and Gwen Lloyd Aubrey to the new post of Clerk. With Dr Sarah Morse and Dr Georgia Burdett we have a formidable staff who serve us well.

With this year's elections, the Fellowship now comprises a total of 387, of which 15% (58) are female. Of course merit and distinction determine election. But it is also vital that a national Society cover the whole of Wales and all its universities, as well as recognising the ability of both sexes. 40% of this year's nominations were for female candidates –up from only 13% in the previous election cycle, and evidence of the impact of the recommendations of the Society's Working Group on Gender balance, chaired by Dame Teresa Rees. The challenge will be to sustain this progress.

The Society is committed to recognising merit for merit's sake, wherever that exists, ensuring gender equality and hence the importance of recognising scholarship across all disciplines, Welsh institutions, commerce, the arts, and public service in Wales.

Mae'r Gymdeithas wedi ymrwymo i gydnabod teilyngdod er mwyn teilyngdod, lle bynnag y bydd yn bodoli, gan sicrhau cydraddoldeb rhwng y rhywiau ac felly pwysigrwydd cydnabod ysgolheictod ar draws yr holl ddisgyblaethau, sefydliadau Cymreig, masnach, y celfyddydau, a gwasanaeth cyhoeddus yng Nghymru.

Consider the contemporary value of a learned society. Why is our learned Society important to our Fellows, to the academic community, to scholarship and to Wales?

- Learned societies value and recognise excellence. We should never apologise for identifying and encouraging the work of outstanding scholars. Indeed we should rejoice and take pride in supporting talent and merit.
- Because of their distinctive, cross disciplinary focus and independence, learned societies play an important challenge function in relation to UK research and teaching.
- In a general sense and distinct from the role of individual institutions, learned societies help translate research and scholarship to professional and practitioner communities, to inspire school

and college students to consider careers, and to promote education and training at undergraduate, postgraduate, and post-doctoral levels.

- Higher education has become intensely competitive. Learned societies offer an additional dimension based on collaboration, mutual assistance and common interest.

So what does our learned society mean for Wales?

Felly beth mae ein cymdeithas ddysgedig yn ei olygu i Gymru?

- We recognise the quality of scholarship existing in our nation and associated with Wales.
- We aim to encourage academics at all stages of their careers.
- We are increasingly representative of the community in Wales and supportive of its many different dimensions. We have for example, under Professor Wynn Thomas's leadership begun to focus on Welsh Studies and to advocate more study in an area important to Welsh identity and to nation building. A greater focus on Welsh Studies will give us a better understanding of who we are. *Bydd mwyo ganolbwyntio ar Astudiaethau Cymreig yn rhoi gwell dealltwriaeth i ni o bwy ydym.*
- We are making an increasing contribution to the UK and Welsh 'soft power', promoting international networks of interest in Welsh institutions, culture and values. These help enhance Wales' absorptive capacity to benefit from the research of other parties in these networks and its attractiveness to high quality international scholars and students. We are a national society, but we must be international in outlook. We cannot afford insularity. Rather, our role is to broaden horizons. *Rydym yn gymdeithas genedlaethol, ond mae'n rhaid inni fod yn rhyngwladol yn ein rhagolygon. Ni allwn fforddio bod yn ynysig. Yn hytrach, ein rôl yw ehangu gorwelion.*
- Consistent with that approach, the Society co-hosted a visit of the President of Academia Europaea to Cardiff earlier this year in connection with the establishment of the Academy's Cardiff Knowledge Hub. Professor Ole Petersen, one of our Vice Presidents, is the Academic Director and Professor John Tucker is a member of the Steering Group. We envisage many joint activities building on the international symposium which we co-hosted here in Cardiff in March.
- Unlike the Royal Society or the British Academy, we represent all disciplines and provide a cross-disciplinary forum for sharing and debating knowledge and making it available to other sectors including schools, public, and policy-makers. We have a responsibility to help build the capacity of academics, practitioners and policymakers in their disciplines, and to work with professional societies and institutions.

Wales has become a more confident nation since 1998. It is right that this should be mirrored by greater appreciation of the quality of our scholarship and the achievements of our universities. But we need to be more confident and assertive in promoting the sector in Wales, albeit crucially as part of the UK HE brand. *Mae angen i ni fod yn fwy hyderus a phendant wrth hyrwyddo'r sector yng Nghymru, er bod hynny yn hanfodol fel rhan o frand Addysg Uwchaf y DU.*

This applies internationally and domestically, given the powers devolved to Wales.

This audience needs no reminding that the Higher Education sector in the UK generally and in Wales is in turbulence. It is very different from the regime which existed when most of us first went to university. Many of the changes are positive. However, the scale and pace of change engenders uncertainty. The dependence on tuition fees as the primary income source is unsettling and frankly risky. The financing of individual institutions is too dependent upon the number of students recruited. Decisions by government in Cardiff or London have direct, and often unexpected consequences. *Mae gan benderfyniadau gan y llywodraeth yng Nghaerdydd neu Lundain ganlyniadau uniongyrchol ond yn aml annisgwyl.*

The Learned Society has a role which is complementary to that of our individual universities. We can offer opinions and expertise in areas where power has been devolved, and on topics like research where responsibility remains in London. We do that impartially and without political favour. The Diamond Review has de facto extended beyond student fee support to the future of the sector in Wales. Our submission was a carefully argued, and well received, specific proposal. It advocated support for those students who need it, regardless of where they study. It would also provide greater certainty of income to the universities, in whose sustainability, we have a key interest.

There is much to be positive about the performance of Welsh research. *Mae llawer i fod yn gadarnhaol amdano ynghylch perfformiad ymchwil yng Nghymru.*

Wales's share of the top 1% highest cited articles is 0.7%, over twice as high as would be expected on the overall publication share of 0.3%. In terms of links with industry, Wales has the highest level of start-ups and spin-offs per unit of per unit Gross Expenditure on Research & Development (GERD) for the UK nations, and the highest level of intellectual property disclosures per unit GERD, in 2011, for the UK constituent countries. Robin Williams, in his 2013 report for the Learned Society, underlined the positive message on the quality of Welsh research. This was reflected in the REF2014 outcome, where more than 75% of research submitted was rated as world-leading (4 star) or internationally excellent (3 star). On the new impact measure, Welsh universities scored particularly well, with nearly half of the research submitted rated world-leading, and above the UK average. Those facts contradict false assumptions that the Welsh universities are "underperforming with respect to the quality and quantity of their research". *Mae'r ffeithiau hynny'n gwrth-ddweud rhagdybiaethau ffug bod prifysgolion Cymru yn "tanberfformio o ran ansawdd a maint eu hymchwil."* But it is true that Wales has not been securing sufficient grants from the high-spending Science and Medical Research councils despite the efforts to submit more proposals. This is not surprising. The simple fact is that the research capacity in Wales, for STEMM disciplines such as clinical medicine, biosciences, physics, engineering and maths is in deficit compared to other nations. Nevertheless Wales is already 'punching above' in terms of research productivity, impact and quality. Just think how much more would be achieved with more resources.

The Society has also responded to invitations from the Welsh Government and the National Assembly to submit opinions in different areas. Your Council considers that in a unicameral legislature, dispassionate, informed, expert advice is an important contribution to the democratic process. We will aim to enhance our role, and to do so, will need to draw upon the expertise with our fellowship.

Of course, the Society must be independent of political party and that position will not be compromised. But that does not mean that the Society cannot work productively with government when objectives are shared and where there is a common interest. *Wrth gwrs, mae'n rhaid i'r Gymdeithas fod yn annibynnol o blaid wleidyddol ac ni fydd y sefyllfa honno yn cael ei pheryglu. Ond nid yw hynny'n golygu na all y Gymdeithas weithio'n gynhyrchiol gyda llywodraeth pan fydd yr amcanion yn cael eu rhannu a lle bod diddordeb cyffredin.*

After the general election, the debate on British membership of the European Union will intensify. Your Officers will monitor what impact this may have on the interests of our Fellowship. One of our Fellows, Professor Borysiewicz, the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, has already flagged up the dilatarious effect which Britain's exit from the EU would have on research income and on British researchers' cooperation with European colleagues.

Looking forward, I believe that the future for your Society is bright and positive.

We expect the award of the Royal Charter in due course. This move from being a limited company would demonstrate pre-eminence, stability and permanence. We are extending our links with other learned societies. Crucially, we want the Fellowship to have particular meaning to those elected into it. The Council is already committed to delivering activity in each of our universities. Enhancing our footprint across Wales is imperative for the national Society, as is recognising the importance of the Welsh language. *Mae'r Cyngor eisoes wedi ymrwymo i gyflawni gweithgarwch ym mhob un o'n prifysgolion. Mae gwella ôl ein troed ledled Cymru yn hanfodol ar gyfer Cymdeithas genedlaethol, fel y mae cydnabod pwysigrwydd yr iaith Gymraeg.*

We recently held a very successful Symposium in Portmeirion on the economics of peripheral nations and regions. Under Professor John Wyn Owen's stewardship, we propose further such symposia. We are also considering plans for a series of distinguished lectures and debates for wider audiences.

I hope Fellows will appreciate the efforts being made to communicate – not just to describe our actions and activities, but to provide information on current, relevant developments.

Rwy'n gobeithio y bydd Cymrodyr yn gwerthfawrogi'r ymdrechion a wneir i gyfathrebu - nid yn unig i ddisgrifio ein gweithredoedd a'n gweithgareddau, ond i ddarparu gwybodaeth am ddatblygiadau cyfredol, perthnasol.

The website is being revamped and 'In Brief' will be a regular communication for Fellows. At the same time, we want to harness the talents of the Fellowship.

There is much to do and realistically resources are stretched. We are most grateful to those who support us financially. But resources, financial and personnel, remain modest. While the Fellowship has grown by 119% over 5 years, staffing levels have remained largely unchanged. So we have to tailor our activities accordingly, and look to garner more financial support.

However our ambitions are rightly high. Securing Royal Title in the future would be further recognition on a par with other Societies. Importantly, there are so many things we can do to encourage, to motivate and to represent scholars. We have an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of the Society for the greater good. *Mae gennym gyfle i ddangos manteision y Gymdeithas er lles pawb.*

We are currently planning wider recognition of scholarship in Wales through instigating two new medals; one which would recognise and promote women in science, and the second, early career success over all three main discipline groupings.

The Learned Society of Wales is unapologetically elite, but it is not elitist. It recognises and represents excellence. It is merit driven, appreciating the national and global dimension, and understands that we live in an intensely competitive environment. *Mae'n cael ei yrru gan deilyngdod, gan werthfawrogi'r dimensiwn cenedlaethol a byd-eang, ac mae'n deall ein bod yn byw mewn amgylchedd hynod gystadleuol.*

Harnessing and developing intellectual skills is a vital contribution to the nation and to its society and economy. That contribution is already substantial. However there is potential to do much more if the resources can be made available. We should be ambitious for the Society and for Wales. *Dylem fod yn uchelgeisiol ar gyfer y Gymdeithas ac ar gyfer Cymru.*

The Society's commitment to excellence and merit should fuel aspirations of the talented, particularly young people. Delivering more first rate research and teaching is a crucial contribution to the common good. That is our mission.

Thank you.

The Learned Society of Wales is Wales's first national scholarly academy. It was established and launched in May 2010. It now has more than three hundred Fellows, who are prominent figures within their respective academic disciplines.

The Society's guiding ethos is Celebrating Scholarship and Serving the Nation: as well as to celebrate, recognise, safeguard and encourage excellence in every one of the scholarly disciplines, its purpose is also to harness and channel the nation's talent, as embodied in its Fellows, for the benefit, primarily, of Wales and its people.

Cymdeithas Ddysgedig Cymru yw academi ysgolheigaidd genedlaethol gyntaf Cymru. Fe'i sefydlwyd a'i lansio ym mis Mai 2010. Bellach mae iddi dros dri chant o Gymrodyr, sy'n ffigurau blaenllaw yn eu disgyblaethau academaidd perthnasol.

Ethos arweiniol y Gymdeithas yw Dathlu Ysgolheictod a Gwasanaethu'r Genedl: yn ogystal â dathlu, cydnabod, diogelu ac annog rhagoriaeth ym mhob un o'r disgyblaethau ysgolheigaidd, ei diben hefyd yw harneisio a sianelu talent y genedl, fel y'i hymgorfforir yn ei Chymrodyr, er budd, yn bennaf, Cymru a'i phobl.

The Learned Society of Wales
The University Registry
King Edward VII Avenue
Cathays Park
Cardiff CF10 3NS

+44(0) 29 2037 6951
lsw@wales.ac.uk
www.learnedsocietywales.ac.uk

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Cymdeithas Ddysgedig Cymru
Coftrestfa'r Brifysgol
Rhodfa'r Brenin Edward VII
Parc Cathays
Caerdydd CF10 3NS

+44(0) 29 2037 6951
cddc@cymru.ac.uk
www.cymdeithasddysgedigcymru.ac.uk

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Rhif Cofrestredig Elusen 1141526
Rhif Cwmni 7256948

