

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Date:	11 May 2005
Time:	9.00am
Title :	Minister's Report

This report updates the Committee on specific issues raised by members and on issues of current interest. Annex A sets out major engagements since the last report

1. Wales Youth Agency

I informed the committee at its meeting on the 9th March that I had decided to cease grant funding the Wales Youth Agency from the 31st December 2005 in order to set up a new team within the Youth and Pupil Participation Division of the Department for Training and Education from January 2006. The new team will have enhanced responsibilities to support and develop youth work and support youth workers and the wider partnership members of Young People's Partnerships.

Officials have produced, in co-operation with the Board of the Wales Youth Agency, a consultation document, which has been distributed to Committee members. A copy of the consultation document can be found at Annex B. (This will be circulated to committee in w/c 9th May)

The Welsh Assembly Government is also working with the Board of the Agency, Principal Youth Officers and the Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Service to arrange a number of informal consultation events which will involve as many local stakeholders as possible to assist in shaping the work of the new team. These are "informal" in the sense of creating an atmosphere where genuine discussion can be held, not in the sense of diminished importance.

The first of these events took place on the 10th May with the remainder to take place during May and June. The document will also be placed on the National Assembly for Wales Internet site offering individuals and organisations an opportunity to comment. The closing date for these comments will be the 14th July 2005.

I would welcome any comments that Committee members may wish to make once they have had time to consider the document.

2. The Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits, with Particular Reference to the SEN Tribunal Decision on Llanidloes Community Primary School

In January the SEN and Disability Discrimination Tribunal for Wales found that a pupil of Llanidloes Community Primary School had been unlawfully discriminated against by the responsible body for the school in that he was treated less favourably by reason of his disability than other pupils who were not disabled. The Tribunal ruled that by September 2005 the school should implement a written policy ensuring that pertinent information concerning individual children with disabilities and/or special educational needs is provided in writing to relevant suppliers of services to the school.

The Tribunal case arose from arrangements made by the school for an outdoor pursuits activity.

The Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 amended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 extending it to include school and post 16 education from September 2002. Duties regarding services for disabled pupils in schools introduced under SENDA are:

- planning duties: to increase access to education for disabled pupils over time; and,
- disability discrimination duties: to protect disabled pupils from discrimination.

The DDA Part 4 requires that ‘responsible bodies’ take such steps as are reasonable to prevent disabled pupils being placed at a substantial disadvantage. That is:

- not to treat disabled students less favourably for a reason related to their disability; and
- to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students

These duties apply not just to teaching and learning but to any service which is provided specifically for students. The duties are anticipatory, that is, schools and LEAs need to anticipate the likely needs of disabled learners and not merely respond to individual needs as they arise.

The Disability Rights Commission published a Code of Practice for Schools in (July 2002). The Codes of Practice provide advice on the factors that might be taken into account in determining ‘reasonableness’ in relation to making adjustments.

Powys County Council is assisting Llanidloes CP School in preparing the written policy it is required to implement to address the Tribunal’s ruling. The authority takes the view that the ruling has general applicability to schools and has approached my Department for assistance in framing guidance.

The Assembly Government Publication 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits: A Good Practice Guide' was issued in October 1999. This is being revised and a new text will be issued for consultation later this year. In preparing the document we will take into account the judgement of the Tribunal in this case. We will also consider whether any other guidance we issue relating to the provision of services to a school by another party might be affected by the conclusions of the Tribunal in this judgement.

3. ACCAC and ELWa Merger – Progress Report

The consultation on the WDA, ELWa and WTB mergers ended on 15 April. In addition to external stakeholders, staff across all merging organisations were invited to respond to the consultation document through a variety of channels. The response from staff, customers, business partners, and other key stakeholders has been significant and work has begun to produce a report summarising the responses. The report and all of the responses will be published in early June and will be available on the Welsh Assembly Government website.

Members of the Senior Teams of the Assembly, ELWa and ACCAC met on 19 April to discuss the emerging structure for the new Department of Education and Lifelong Learning (DELL). Their considerations were based around the recommendations of task and finish design groups which had been drawn from across the three merging organisations. The outcome of those discussions will now be considered alongside the proposals beginning to emerge from the other merger projects covering economic development and transport and corporate services. The aim is to have a proposed initial structure for the new DELL ready for consultation with staff by early June.

4. Healthy Vending in Schools

During 2004 we piloted healthy vending in secondary schools in Pembrokeshire. As a result of the pilot guidance (attached at Annex C) has been produced and is currently being prepared for publication

The four schools involved in the pilot were part of the Pembrokeshire healthy school scheme, which was the first to be accredited as part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes.

Pupils from each school worked with the caterers to identify the foods to be included in the machines. The publication is being produced in time for a vending exhibition in Earls Court in May, and for a UK healthy vending conference in Peterborough in June, so that work in Wales can be acknowledged at these events.

Head teachers and heads of catering in every secondary school in Wales will receive a copy. The document will also be available on the healthy school website.

5. Estyn's Annual Plan 2005-06

I have agreed Estyn's Corporate Plan for 2005-08. The specific details provided in the plan for the 2005-06 are consistent with the requirements at s87 of the Learning and Skills Act, 2000 and ensures that Estyn's work complements the Government's Learning Country agenda.

The Plan provides a detailed and comprehensive overview of the challenges and strategic priorities for the inspectorate in the next three years. It also sets out planned inspection activity for 2005-08, and details the advice and support to be provided to Welsh Assembly Government in 2005-06 as part of work commissioned through Estyn's annual remit. The plan will be published shortly on Estyn's website (www.estyn.gov.uk).

I welcome, in particular, the extended format of the Plan at Section 3 that underlines the extensive programme of work proposed to develop inspection arrangements in Wales through both the roll out of the Common Inspection Framework and the ongoing attention to be given to specific sectors - including the revised arrangements for the inspection of local education authorities and the introduction of an area based approach to the inspection of adult community based learning. Along with the changes flowing from the new Education Act, the work proposed will ensure that Estyn is well placed to provide independent and sound advice on the quality of education and the standards achieved by learners.

I also welcome the good attention being given to securing ongoing feedback from key stakeholders through formal consultation with key partners including ACCAC, ELWa and HEFCW. In addition, the Audit Commission and key Inspectorates and regulatory bodies in Wales – SSIW, CSIW and the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales - have been provided with the opportunity to comment. Estyn will be making full use of both existing groups and the links proposed with learners throughout Wales to ensure that its work is informed by feedback at all levels.

6. Welsh Baccalaureate

I was delighted to accept the invitation of the WJEC to present successful students with their Intermediate (Level 2) Welsh Baccalaureate Diploma Award Certificate at the Millennium Centre on 25 April.

The Intermediate Diploma (level 2) is designed so that it would normally be a two-year programme, but there is the opportunity to complete it within one year.

13 students completed their award within one year and a further 33 students have now completed theirs within 18 months i.e by March 2005. All these students have achieved their Options, all 6 key skills in a combination of level 1 and 2, and they have completed all the other mandatory requirements of the Welsh Bac. Core.

I am also pleased to report that some of these successful Intermediate students have indicated their intention to move on to the higher requirements of the Advanced (Level 3) Baccalaureate. Progression has always been one of the key aims for the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.

7. Want to Work

'Want to Work' is a joint Welsh Assembly Government / Jobcentre Plus community-based initiative now operating in the three local authority areas of Merthyr, Neath Port Talbot and Cardiff. Part funded through £11m Objective One and Three European Social Funds, it offers those people who are economically inactive, claiming benefit and who want to work, the help and support they need to find employment. The aim is to engage with a minimum of 4,000 benefit claimants and help at least 1,000 of these into sustainable work over the three year lifetime of the project.

In addition to the support provided by Jobcentre Plus, key elements are, a financial package which provides a job preparation premium of £20 per week and, for the hardest to help customers only, a return to work credit averaging £40 per week for the first year in work; the provision of support from a health professional, funded from Assembly Government health budgets, to work alongside Jobcentre Plus services; and a bespoke training package for in-work training provided through £2m of funding from ELWa.

The launch of the initiative will be made jointly by the First Minister with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, on Wednesday 18th May in Merthyr Tydfil.

8. PE And School Sport (PESS) Launch Of "In The Zone" Playground Package

I was pleased to attend the recent launch at Meadow Lane Primary School in Cardiff of a new playground package called In the Zone – one of a range of specialist projects emerging through the work being developed and led by the Sports Council for Wales to deliver the Assembly's "PE and School Sport Action Plan for Wales". The aim of the playground package is to encourage and support schools to create learning zones in the playground linked to specific activities that encourage constructive play - to help counteract pupil boredom at break times, reduce bullying and increase exercise and learning. In trials with four schools, it has proved popular and effective and is now being rolled out to schools across Wales.

What makes the package special is that alongside the re-introduction of traditional games, such as hopscotch and skipping, to encourage more active play, it also reflects the different needs of children by including a zone to simply "chill out" so that all pupils are included.

The package can be accessed by all schools and has been designed to improve the ability of lunchtime supervisors to provide a happy and safe environment for children. In the first move of its kind in the UK, Wales will be offering training for its midday supervisors to manage In the Zone.

The lunchtime break offers much potential for children to learn and be active and can go a long way to encourage children to undertake the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity five times a week. In this respect, the initiative makes an important connection with the Assembly's wider policies and cross-

cutting programmes for encouraging a healthy, fitter society set out in Well Being in Wales, Climbing Higher and the Food and Fitness Strategy.

9. Keep Wales Tidy Week:

On 11 April I presented Nantyglo Comprehensive School with the prestigious European Green Flag award following their completion of the Eco-Schools programme to improve the schools environmental performance. The European Green Flag programme make awards to schools who take pride in the way that they look after the areas in which pupils learn and play.

A key feature of the Eco Schools programme is that pupils play a major part in taking and acting upon decisions about their schools environment. Keep Wales Tidy Group manages the Eco-Schools programme in Wales through funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

The ceremony was the first in a series of National events to mark 'Tidy Wales Week' run by Keep Wales Tidy to encourage the people of Wales to participate in cleaning up their neighbourhood.

On 14 April, joined Ysgol Babanod Penrhiwfer in their "Green Tea Party" celebrations. The school had achieved their Eco-schools Green Flag Award. This flag is the highest award that a school can receive for looking after their environment. The school also achieved first prize in RCT In bloom competition , Bronze and Silver Eco awards and second prize in the All Wales recycling competition. They have also gained their Basic Skills Award.

10. Welfare To Work And New Deal Programmes: Statistical Update

The New Deal is a non-devolved programme delivered UK-wide by Jobcentre Plus on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Nevertheless, it plays a very important role in helping the long-term unemployed and economically inactive people to find jobs, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to note its success in Wales. Latest figures for the New Deal for 18-24 programme indicate that Wales is achieving a markedly higher rate of young people into sustained employment than in England and Scotland. Figures correct to the end of December 2004 show that in Wales, 40% of those who have started on the programme have been able to secure sustained employment. The same figure for both England and Scotland is 35%.