

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

ELL Minister's Report to ELL Committee Meeting 11 May 2005 - ELL Committee 'School Of The Future Report'

Introduction

The ELL Committee published its Interim Report on 'The School of the Future' in March 2003. It was presented to the Assembly in Plenary on 25 March 2003. The report made four recommendations as follows:

- Our vision for a community focused school should provide the blueprint for the school of the future.
- The new Assembly Minister should report to the appropriate committee, in response to this report, setting out a programme for managing the substantial changes required over the next 15 years.
- The appropriate committee, with advice from the reference group, should carry out further exploration of the following:
 - community focused schools;
 - curriculum and assessment;
 - enriching the learning experience.
- The Welsh Assembly Government recognises the importance of schools in countering social disadvantage.

I responded to all the report recommendations on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government in my Statement to Plenary on 25 June 2003. A copy of my Statement is at Annex D to this report.

In response to the second of the report's recommendations - that I should report to the Committee setting out a programme for managing the substantial changes required for taking forward the 'School of the Future' agenda - I said I would present my report to ELL Committee, that my report would carry forward the agenda for schools set out in The Learning Country and that I envisaged it would focus on:

- extension of Early Years provision

- development of the Foundation Phase ages 3-7
- review of assessment arrangements at KS2 and KS3
- transition from primary to secondary school
- under-performance at KS3
- Learning Pathways 14-19
- Welsh BaccaLaureate
- Iaith Pawb
- development of SEN including regional provision
- attendance and more flexible provision for disaffected pupils
- reducing teacher workloads and bureaucratic burdens on schools
- use of IT for teaching and learning
- Continuing Professional Development for teachers
- Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools
- a voice for pupils in school provision
- school buildings which are accessible to all and incorporate principles of sustainability.

My first report in response to the recommendation was included in my monthly report to the ELL Committee meeting on 19 January 2005. The Committee decided there was insufficient time at that meeting to fully consider my report so it was deferred to a future meeting. I am therefore now resubmitting my report to the Committee what has been achieved in taking forward the 'School of the Future' agenda in relation to these issues since my Plenary Statement. The report I am now making has been updated since January.

Early Years

Working with LEAs and their Early Years Development and Childcare partnership over the last three years, the Welsh Assembly Government has invested almost £39m and created an additional 11,000 places through a mixed economy provision with the voluntary sector playing an equal part. Integrated Centres are in operation in Rhondda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly, Conwy, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire, Powys, Denbighshire and Merthyr Tydfil.

We have made a further commitment of almost £23m for 2005-06 to sustain the current level of provision and enhance the Integrated Centre programme.

In 2006/07 and 2007/08 a total of £50 million will be allocated for Early Years and the continued development of Integrated Centres, based mainly around primary schools. This will build on their traditional role at the centre of the community.

Foundation Phase

In September 2004 the Foundation Phase was piloted in 41 settings, including 22 schools, across Wales. ACCAC has produced a draft Framework for Children's Learning which is being used by pilot settings to guide their planning and practice. ACCAC is also producing guidance documents that will help settings to implement the new Framework.

The pilot schools have been given sufficient funding to provide a ratio of 1 adult to 8 children. This brings them in line with voluntary/private sector settings which, under the Care Standards for Wales guidelines, currently have to provide a 1:8 ratio.

All aspects of the Foundation Phase will be closely monitored and evaluated to assess the impact of the changes on the education of our youngest children. The full roll out of the Foundation Phase is scheduled to start in September 2006 and to be completed by September 2008 for all schools and funded settings providing education to 3-7 year olds.

Review of Assessment Arrangements at KS2 and KS3

I reported to the Committee on 10 November 2004 on the positive response to the consultation on the National Curriculum Assessment Arrangements for 11 and 14 year olds.. A full report on the consultation exercise was published on the Internet in January this year.

Amendment of the Key Stage 2 regulations to facilitate change was approved by the Assembly on 9 November 2004. Schools have been told about the 2005 assessment arrangements. In particular, the Key Stage 2 tests will be optional for 2005. A free optional external marking service has been made available to all schools that decide to use the optional test materials.

Key Stage 3 tests remain statutory for 2005. Amendments to the Key Stage 3 regulations removing the statutory basis of the tests from 2006 will be brought before the Assembly before the summer recess. .

I have asked ACCAC to work out details of the Year 5 skills tests and teacher moderation arrangements. When completed, these will be the subject of a further consultation exercise.

Transition from Primary to Secondary School

We know that good progress at Key Stage 3 can be influenced by effective transition arrangements for pupils moving from primary to secondary school. A number of measures have therefore been taken to secure a specific emphasis on curriculum planning so that schemes of work build on what has been taught previously and provide continuity in teaching and learning. Action to date includes publication by Estyn of guidance on how primary and secondary schools and LEAs can work together to improve transition, identification of transition as one of the priority areas for support from the Better Schools Fund and provision of additional INSET days for transition planning.

In November last year I attended a national conference hosted by ACCAC to launch further guidance and support. This included guidance for schools on the use of Bridging Units. In addition, ACCAC in partnership with BBC Wales, has provided all schools with examples of good practice in managing transition based on filmed case studies and interviews with practitioners across Wales.

The conference was also used to launch a consultation paper taking forward a Wales only provision in the Education Act 2002 setting out proposals to require the governing bodies of maintained secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, jointly, to draw up Transition Plans. The consultation period ended on 25 February and responses are currently being drawn together. A summary of responses will be published on the Learning Wales website in the next few weeks. .

Under-Performance at KS3

In The Learning Country I set out my commitment to tackle under-performance at Key Stage 3 and ensure that there is continuity and progression for all pupils moving from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. To address this I have asked ACCAC, Estyn and the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) to provide a rolling programme of support (Aiming for Excellence) for schools and LEAs. This has included the publication of guidance on raising standards in literacy, numeracy, and ICT across the curriculum at Key Stage 3. The programme is supported by the Better Schools Fund and is also being assisted by initiatives and funds directed at secondary schools by the Basic Skills Agency as part of their implementation of the all-age Basic Skills Strategy for Wales.

Learning Pathways 14-19

I have made regular reports to the Assembly on progress in developing and implementing Learning Pathways 14-19.

After the publication of the Action Plan in April 2003, we moved quickly, carefully and collaboratively to produce the Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance. The guidance was officially launched in September 2004 and will be updated as Learning Pathways 14-19 rolls out in the coming years.

14-19 Networks, responsible for the planning and delivery of Learning Pathways, have been established in each local authority area. The Youth and Pupil Participation team work closely with Network representatives in taking forward the agenda. The 14-19 Networks are now working on their second annual Development Plan

£1.5 million was available to support developments in 2004-05, including the support of pilots in the key areas of: Learning Coach; Personal Support; Work Focused Experience; and Community Participation. The results of the pilots will be evaluated and fed into the revised guidance. The outcome of the Learning Coach pilots will also inform the development of bespoke training materials and the introduction of a qualification to at least level 3. A team from the University of Glamorgan (First Campus) are currently working on training units and this stage is scheduled for completion in July.

In 2005-6 the funding allocation has risen to £2 million and will increase to £8.5million in 2006-7 and £32.5million in 2007-8. Two ESF bids for capacity building in Objective 1 and 3 areas have recently been successful and will run for two years providing an additional £2.9 million.

The first update of the guidance is scheduled for late summer 2005. As well as information on the pilots it will include a substantial section on the Learning Core, work on which has been co-ordinated by ACCAC.

Welsh Baccalaureate

Since my statement on 25 June 2003 I have made regular reports to the Assembly on progress on the Welsh Baccalaureate pilot and WJEC made a presentation to the Committee on 9 February 2005. The first cohort of Welsh Baccalaureate students commenced their studies in September 2003. Later that month UCAS announced its decision to award 120 tariff points to the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Core Certificate at Advanced Level - a real boost for the existing students and the second cohort that began their studies in September 2004. On 7 July 2004 I reported to ELL Committee that 7 schools and colleges will form the third cohort of pilot centres. These 7 centres will begin the delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate in September 2005. I can confirm that funding is available for the development of a Foundation Level Welsh Baccalaureate in 2005, in line with our commitment in Wales A Better Country. This will further enhance the attraction of the Welsh Baccalaureate. An additional £200,000 in 2005-06, £1 million in 2006-07 and £1.5 million in 2007-08 will be available to support the development of the Welsh Baccalaureate as we move towards national roll-out, which, subject to evaluation, will be from September 2007.

44 of the first cohort students have so far successfully completed the Welsh Baccalaureate Intermediate Diploma. The first full set of results will be available this Summer.

The DfES published its White Paper on 14-19 Education and Skills on 23 February. The White Paper was the DfES' detailed response to final report of the Mike Tomlinson's Working Group on 14-19 Reform in England, which was published on 18 October 2004. Although the White Paper is for England only it is clear that work stemming from it will have significant implications here in Wales. DfES Ministers acknowledged the importance the White Paper for Wales and other parts of the UK and made clear commitments to work closely with colleagues in those countries to ensure that developments take account of the needs and circumstances in other parts of the UK and are compatible with structures there, including the Welsh Baccalaureate.

Iaith Pawb

I highlighted the achievements within my portfolio in relation to Iaith Pawb in my report to the Committee on 24 September 2004.

Iaith Pawb commits the Welsh Assembly Government in 2005-06 to introducing a pilot programme of intensive Welsh Language training for qualified teachers by offering immersion learning in sabbaticals. A similar commitment is also made in respect of the post-16 sector to maximise the numbers of practitioners teaching through the medium of Welsh. Officials have been working to identify possible providers for the training programme and held meetings with various partner organisations to discuss possible joint-working arrangements. Discussions with ELWa have concluded that the proposed schemes for secondary schoolteachers and post-16 practitioners can be combined.

We therefore intend working closely with ELWa to develop and pilot a training programme for secondary school teachers and FE practitioners with the benefits of reducing costs and securing a uniform standard of provision between secondary schools and the post-16 sectors.

ELWa has already made significant progress in developing a pilot training programme in language skills and bilingual methodology for post-16 practitioners and we now plan to extend this programme to cover secondary school teachers.

We anticipate that the details of the scheme for secondary school teachers and FE practitioners will be finalised and a training provider identified by the end of June so that the scheme can be marketed, materials prepared and staff trained to allow FE practitioners and secondary school teachers to apply for sabbaticals before the end of 2005.

In addition, Teaching and Leadership Division has identified the need for a separate pilot programme for primary teachers. In March 2005 a meeting was held with primary practitioners from all LEAs to identify their needs and to look at issues to consider in developing Welsh language sabbaticals for primary teachers. It was clear from the meeting that their needs are clearly different to those of secondary teachers and this needs to be taken into account by developing a pilot programme for Welsh language sabbaticals for primary teachers. Representatives at the meeting called for a balance of theory and practice with good networking facilities and a follow-up programme for teachers who have completed the training. A project board of teachers was drawn from the meeting who will support the future development of the sabbatical programme for primary teachers.

We anticipate that the details of the scheme for primary teachers will be finalised and a training provider identified by the end of July so that the scheme can be marketed, materials prepared and staff trained to allow primary school teachers to apply for sabbaticals before the end of 2005.

In September 2004 I reported that I had made an additional £400,000 available to ACCAC to support their work on commissioning of Welsh and bilingual classroom materials and qualifications through the medium of Welsh, this has now been increased to £500,000. This will enable all primary schools to obtain, free of charge, additional Welsh medium and bilingual classroom materials.

I have asked the Welsh Language Board to take the lead in developing and implementing immersion and

intensive language teaching pilot projects involving primary school pupils.

At the end of the Summer term 2004 we funded pilot projects centred on 3 secondary schools – Maes Garmon, Mold ; Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin and Ysgol y Porth, Rhondda. Over 100 Year 6 pupils took part over 6 weeks. The models varied: in two models, the intensive teaching took place in the secondary school ; in the other model, it took place at the "home" primary schools. Those pupils are now in their first year in secondary school, each of which is making specific provision to build on that intensive experience. In addition, from last September we also funded a pilot project in one school, Ysgol Glanconwy, starting with pupils in Year 3.

In the coming summer term, the pilot projects will be repeated at the 3 secondary schools with a new set of Year 6 pupils, and 3 more secondary schools will be joining in the pilot projects for the first time.

This coming summer, we will also be starting a pilot involving pupils in Year 5 aged 9 and 10. They will have the same sort of intensive language experience at the end of the school year as those who took part in last year's pilots - but in this model it will be carried on throughout their final year in primary school.

On the experience of the more modest pilots to date, these pupils arrive at secondary school with far more developed language skills than would otherwise have been the case. It is clearly very important that to capitalise on this boost in language skills suitable provision is made by the secondary schools either by way of immersion or through extended second language provision.

We are also fully committed to developing Welsh language provision for early years and achieving a progressive increase in the proportion of children within Welsh medium or bilingual settings. This starts with training practitioners and raising quality standards to allow increased access to Welsh medium early years provision.

The £4.87m contract with Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin/Trinity College, Carmarthen to deliver a new training programme for Welsh-medium early years practitioners has proved very successful. To date, 201 Level 3 and 96 Level 2 candidates have been placed. 40 assessors have been appointed. Discussion is ongoing to include Foundation Phase pilot practitioners in the training available.

I will continue to provide further reports to Committee on progress.

Special Educational Needs

We are continuing to develop our policies in relation to additional learning needs to ensure all children have a flying start and barriers to learning are removed to ensure equality of opportunity. We will continue to move towards the key principle set out in the Special Education Needs Code of Practice for Wales that all children who have special educational needs will have those needs met.

Inclusive Education: following consultation on draft guidance issued in December 2003, the guidance

has now been expanded to ensure the needs of all children with additional learning needs are covered in the final document. We are working with a range of stakeholders to ensure we develop robust policies in this area.

Our aim is to promote a strategy of inclusive education that will ensure LEAs and schools have coherent plans for the development of inclusion, high expectations and inclusive whole school targets, and strategies to develop the training needs of staff. We will be monitoring the impact of inclusion in Wales very closely and will be asking Estyn to monitor inclusive educational practices as part of their remit during 2006/07.

Regional Provision: the Education Act 2002 contains the necessary powers to enable regional collaboration.

The first regional autistic spectrum disorder facility in Wales has been established in North Wales at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn in Denbighshire. Provision for pupils in South East Wales with Aspergers Syndrome is being developed at a secondary resource unit at Fairwater Comprehensive School in Torfaen.

We are currently in discussion with local authorities to facilitate collaborative arrangements for the delivery of special needs services in other areas of Wales. Following an audit of provision across Wales, guidance will be issued for consultation in 2005.

Educational Psychology (EP): in 2003, the Assembly commissioned Applied Psychology Associates to undertake a review of educational psychology services in Wales. The review included the role and responsibility, recruitment and retention, and forward trends for the EP service in Wales.

We have drafted guidance on the role of EPs. This includes recommendations relating to the number of training places and continuous professional development. This document has been produced in partnership with principal EPs and LEAs.

In Wales currently, the only EP course available is run by Cardiff University.

The BPS has decided to no longer validate the one year EP course. Instead, they wish to bring it in line with other psychological disciplines for which the training route is an initial degree in psychology, followed by a three year full time specialist course. DfES now plan to review the functions of EPs against the changing landscape of children's services. Officials will meet with DfES early in May to discuss the way forward and also to participate in the DfES review of EP services, which is being undertaken by independent consultants.

Speech and Language: a speech and language joint co-ordinator post is currently being established within the Assembly Government. Pilot projects to facilitate and trial a joint commissioning and pooled budget approach within integrated services for both health and education professionals are up and running.

We are taking forward joint commissioning arrangements between health, education, social services and local authorities to achieve shared goals which will result in provision of a service which is superior to services provided separately.

Sensory Impairment: in December 2004 the Assembly published its final consultation document on multi sensory impairment which completes the trilogy of sensory impairment guidance documents. The documents set out standards for the delivery of services to children and young people with sensory impairments and suggest a regional approach. Final guidance will be issued during the Summer Term 2005 encapsulating standards for children with Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment and Multi Sensory Impairment.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder: a joint strategy is currently being developed across health and education for the delivery of services to children and adults with ASD. I anticipate a first draft of this document should be available in the Summer of 2005.

I am pleased that the Committee has elected to undertake its three part review of special educational needs covering early identification and intervention; statutory assessment and statementing; and transition over the period to January 2006. The Assembly Government has put social inclusion at the heart of all its policies. Ensuring we deliver the best possible services for some of our most vulnerable children and young people will continue to be a key priority in the delivery of education services across Wales.

Attendance and Disaffection

We are committed to improving attendance at school and ensuring that young people are getting as much education as possible to ensure that they are fulfilling their potential. Our approach to tackling attendance issues has been informed by the work of the Attendance Task and Finish Group, made up of representatives of the wide-range of organisations involved in tackling truancy and its effects.

The Group published its report in February 2003. This contained a series of recommendations and an action plan. Progress on the recommendations includes:

- simplifying the guidance on classification of absences making it easier for schools to record attendance;
- collection of statistics on attendance at primary schools since spring 2004 (previously only data from secondary schools was collected);
- the establishment of two advisory groups:
- The Long Term Advisory Working Group which meets on a regular basis to provide advice to the

Attendance Task Group;

- The Prosecution Working Group which is a short life group reviewing the process of taking attendance cases through the courts and producing a guidance document;
- the first national truancy sweep at the end of September 2003 involving all Welsh LEAs and police forces to raise the profile of the issue of attendance at school. A further national sweep took place in December 2004.
- holding a conference on attendance and behaviour in June 2004 to highlight and share good practice.

Since 1999 there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of sessions missed due to pupil absenteeism from secondary schools, from 10.6% in 1999 to 9.4% in 2004.

We will be making a determined assault on attendance over the coming year. This will include the introduction of an attendance benchmarking system for secondary schools in May 2005. In addition, £6 million funding will be made available over the next 3 years from 2005-06 for electronic attendance packages for schools across Wales.

The Better Schools Fund made available £5.85m to local education authorities in 2004-05 for pupil support, which was largely for the funding of projects to address behaviour and attendance issues. We also provided £500,000 each year from 2002-03 to 2004-05 to fund 10 pilot projects to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to pupil disengagement. The piloted approaches included providing learning mentors in schools, running Webster-Stratton programmes for young pupils and using trained army personnel to deliver outdoor activity training. Good practice from these pilots will be disseminated and inform future policy development.

We are currently reviewing National Assembly Circular 3/99 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion' which provides guidance on a range of school-based actions to address pupil disaffection and challenge behaviour difficulties and poor attendance. A revised circular is expected to go out for consultation shortly.

Teacher Workload/Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens

The Committee welcomed signing of the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload in January 2003 in its report on the School of the Future. Since then, two phases of the contractual changes aimed at reducing teachers' workload and giving them a better work/life balance have come into effect. Teachers no longer have to undertake administrative and clerical tasks, and there is an annual limit of 38 hours on covering for absent colleagues. These changes mean teachers have more time to focus on their professional duties of teaching and learning, leading to higher standards of pupil achievement.

The Assembly Government has worked closely with the other signatories and with LEAs in Wales to

support schools in implementing the agreement. A network of LEA change co-ordinators has been set up to provide help and advice to schools on the contractual changes. Training has also been provided in 'change management' techniques to help schools develop strategies for delivery of the agreement according to their own needs and circumstances while making the best use of all available resources.

The Education (Specified Work and Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2004 were made by the Assembly in July 2004. They provide the statutory basis to help schools implement the agreement, giving them flexibility to deploy support staff in new roles in support of teachers, provided they are suitably skilled and always supervised by a teacher.

This work has been supported with £33m funding provided through the local government revenue settlement in 2004-05. In 2005-06, a further £25m has been allocated to help schools continue to implement the Agreement including the provision of training for support staff. On present plans, funding will rise by another £12m to £70m in 2006-07.

Alongside action to reduce teachers' workload I have taken fresh action to tackle unnecessary bureaucracy in schools by setting up the School Workload Advisory Panel (SWAP). The SWAP is a panel of six independent practitioners who review existing and future policies affecting schools and advise on ways to reduce or minimise their bureaucratic impact.

IT in Teaching and Learning

The Welsh Assembly Government will be working with LEAs and others over the coming year on the development of an ICT strategy for schools in Wales. The strategy will focus on teaching and learning and how these can be effectively supported by ICT, but will also cover a number of other practical issues including sustainable funding and best value procurement.

National Grid for Learning – NGfL Cymru has been established for over two years providing high quality bilingual online teaching and learning resources. In 2004 the Innovation Schools Fund was launched providing the opportunity for teachers to develop their own ideas for web based content.

Broadband Lifelong Learning Network: the Assembly has provided funding over the past three years to assist local authorities to connect all schools, public libraries and ICT learning centres into this national broadband network. Funding has also been provided for technical support and advisory posts in each authority in order to help develop the effective use of the network.

As at January 2005, 100% of secondary schools, 89% of primary schools, and 93% of ICT learning centres had been connected to the Lifelong Learning Network. We are monitoring progress on a monthly basis and are seeking to achieve 100% connectivity at the benchmark levels of 8mb connectivity into secondary schools and 2mb into primary schools. Figures for January 2005 show that 205 out of 232 secondary schools and 1128 out of 1657 primary and special schools had achieved the benchmark levels

Utilising e-learning technology (other ICT teaching and learning developments): support has been provided to develop a web-based awareness raising programme for teachers on special educational needs. We are also engaged with a European funded programme, led by the Welsh Dyslexia Project, to build an exemplar web-based training approach for those teaching and supporting dyslexic pupils.

We are looking at new ways to achieve effective practitioner development through technology. In 2005 training for teachers involved in the new Foundation Phase will use e-learning techniques alongside conventional methods, where the former have been identified as the most effective in reaching large numbers of individuals quickly.

The School ICT Asset Database: the database has been designed to provide the Assembly Government, and its local authority partners, with information on the current provision of ICT equipment in schools. It is intended that this will help inform future ICT procurement arrangements; initiatives to improve ICT provision; and enhancements to LEA guidance on maintenance and technical support.

Continuing Professional Development for Teachers

CPD is at the heart of the Assembly Government's strategy to raise professional standards and thereby to raise the level of pupil achievement. The Assembly Government has a strong commitment to strengthening teachers' continuing professional development and particularly to ensuring that it is tailored to the needs of individual teachers and the needs of the schools in which they work.

Since July 2001, the GTC has been administering a range of individually focussed CPD projects, which focus on the individual professional development needs of teachers on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Council's CPD programme, which was administered on a pilot basis for three years, has proved very popular with teachers and schools alike. Given this success, the programme was put on a permanent footing from 1 April 2004 with the GTCW responsible for delivery and funding .

Since 2001, the Welsh Assembly Government has allocated over £15m to the GTCW to support its CPD programme. To date over 19,000 development opportunities have been funded and uptake continues to be high.

The Council's CPD programme ensures that CPD opportunities are available for all teachers at all stages of their careers from their first to their last posting, through Induction and Early Professional Development right through to leadership/headship.

In September 2003, a statutory Induction period for all newly qualified teachers was introduced in Wales. Induction supports teachers during the first year of their teaching career by providing them with 10% non-contact time to enable them to undertake their professional development activities. Schools are entitled to funding of £3,700 per year to support the Induction of each newly qualified teacher.

Following the successful completion of their Induction period, teachers are entitled to undertake a

programme of Early Professional Development during their second and third years of teaching. This programme is unique to Wales and schools are entitled to funding of £1,000 per year to support teachers undertaking Early Professional Development. During their second and third years, teachers are encouraged to set objectives that meet their personal professional development aims within the context of their school.

During 2005, we are undertaking a quinquennial review of the National Headship Development Programme in Wales. I officially launched the review at a national consultation conference in February 2005. The review will take account of the new national standards for headteachers in Wales, which will be introduced in January 2006 to coincide with the launch of a revised National Professional Qualification for Headship.

In addition, at ELL Committee on 19 January 2005, I announced the establishment of a separate funding stream of £1.55m to support the leadership developments during 2005/06. This will include £750,000 to support the National Professional Qualification for Headship, which will become a mandatory requirement for all first-time, substantive headteachers from 1 September 2005. The move towards a mandatory headship qualification will ensure consistent professional development for all first-time school leaders in Wales. The regulations underpinning the mandatory headship qualification were approved in Plenary on 26 April 2005.

I have recently attended two national ceremonies to award the NPQH qualification to a further 120 teachers who successfully completed the qualification during 2004/05. Over 650 teachers now hold the NPQH in Wales, with a further 370 teachers currently working towards the qualification.

Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools

The report of Phase I of this important study undertaken jointly with the WLGA looked at the experience of secondary schools that have demonstrated that deprivation and poor performance do not have to go together. It was published in October 2002 and the study findings were widely disseminated over the following 12 months. Phase II looking at primary schools commenced in 2003 and is nearing completion. A meeting of the Steering Group of which I and Peter Black AM are members was held on 18 April to consider the draft report. The Steering Group endorsed the draft report and its emerging conclusions. Publication of the final report is anticipated in early Autumn 2005, with dissemination events following.

Voice for Pupils in School Provision

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that children and young people have a voice on issues that affect them.

We have established and are supporting Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales which celebrated its second birthday recently. At local level, youth forums now exist across

Wales to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in democratic decision making. We are also developing work on participation within the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that young people have opportunities to contribute, be listened to and have their input acted upon in all national policies, including education and training, which affect their lives. We are working to develop structures which demonstrate to children & young people that participation can make a real difference: "having a voice, having a choice".

In 2003 we consulted on making school councils a statutory requirement for primary, secondary and special schools and on guidance for governing bodies and LEAs on consulting pupils about decisions which affect them. In the light of the consultation exercise regulations on schools councils will be made this year and guidance on pupil participation and schools councils will be issued.

I have also in February this year consulted on draft guidance for governing bodies on the handling of complaints involving pupils. The consultation document includes handling of complaints relating to child abuse, including complaints about abuse unrelated to the school setting and takes account of recommendations in the Clywch inquiry report. The deadline for responses is 17 May 2005. I anticipate the final guidance will be issued in early in the start of the new school year September 2005.

School Buildings and Management of School Places

The Assembly Government has made a commitment to ensuring that by 2010 all schools are housed in buildings fit for teaching and learning in the 21st century. There is still a considerable way to go but we are ensuring that funding of £560m will be provided during the lifetime of this Assembly. Funding has risen to £143m in 2005-06 and will be sustained at that annual level until at least the end of the decade. This total does not include Assembly support for PFI schemes, a number of PFI schools are due to come into use in 2005-06 . We are currently assessing local authorities' asset management plans to identify future funding needs. Local education authorities are required to manage the growing numbers of surplus school places in the interests of focusing resources on high quality education provision for all pupils. The Committee's review of the supply of school places early in 2001, confirmed that there was surplus capacity to be addressed in both primary and secondary schools in Wales. A growing number of authorities are starting to tackle surplus places alongside concerted action to ensure high quality provision in modern or modernised buildings which also provide improved access for disabled pupils.

In the next year we will be working with authorities on adoption of the recently developed BRREAM standards for sustainability in school buildings.

Community Focused Schools

The Learning Country set out the Welsh Assembly Government's aim that schools should be at the heart of their community providing a range of services and activities to help meet the needs of pupils, their families and the wider community. Phase I of the Narrowing the Gap Study had important messages about the ways schools need to work with their communities in order to raise the status of learning and,

in some cases, to act as agents for change in the local community. The case for community focused schools was also made in the Committee's report on the School of the Future.

Powers in the Education Act 2002 make it easier for governing bodies to provide community facilities and services, give flexibility to governing bodies to enter into agreements with partners to provide services on school premises, and enable governing bodies to charge for some services. At the time of my Statement to Plenary we had just consulted on draft guidance to assist schools and their key partners in developing a community focus. The final guidance was published in December 2003. I have taken every opportunity to communicate the Assembly Government's vision for schools at the heart of their communities and I am encouraged by the number of schools I visit which have an active and growing programme of community engagement.

For 2005-06 and in each of the following two years we will be providing £2m for the development of community focused schools and a further £1m targeted specifically at small and rural schools. I am looking to fund exemplar schemes that can either be replicated elsewhere or used as models of good practice; or to provide start up funding for initiatives. Consultation on the criteria for the use of the funding will start this month. Allocations will be made to local education authorities and the final guidance issued on the criteria for the use of the funding before the start of the new school year in September.

Conclusion

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to a dynamic all-ability comprehensive school system, with an emphasis on the school being embedded in its local community. The Learning Country sets out our aim for schools to be to be places where:

- learners' interests come first;
- there is wider access and opportunity for all; and
- lifelong learning is a reality,

with school housed in buildings fit for teaching and learning in the 21st century.

The Committee's report stated that the school of the future in Wales would:

- provide high quality and inspirational teaching and learning;
- provide a broad and stimulating curriculum offering choice;
- allow learners to develop at their own pace with attainment targets and methods of assessment designed to recognise a wider range of achievement;
- incorporate social inclusion, sustainable development, equal opportunities and bilingualism into all aspects of school life,

with great emphasis on the need for schools to have a community focus.

Welsh Assembly Government's vision for schools set out in the Learning Country accords with the Committee's vision for the school of the future accords. I have outlined in this report the action that we are taking to achieve this. I recognise that we still have a lot to do to achieve the vision of our schools:

- being accessible all year round and for extended hours each day;
- providing expanded out of hours learning for pupils to give them a wider range of experiences, reinforce work done during the school day, improve their key skills and develop their motivation and self-esteem;
- providing services to their local communities and planning new provision with local partners;
- having a school year pattern which is sensible in terms of delivery of services to pupils and the local community; and
- delivering high quality education with equality of opportunity for all pupils irrespective of where in Wales they attend school.

But I am confident that through The Learning Country policies and initiatives we are on track to achieve this and to fulfil the Committee's report recommendations.

Annexes

Pupil Numbers and Projections

Attached at Annex A is a table showing the trend in pupil numbers in the years 2000 to 2004. These figures represent actual pupils, not full time equivalents.

Attached at Annex B is a table extracted from Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2004 giving pupil projections based on the school population of Wales at January 2004 and the trends indicated by the 2003 based mid-year projection of the home population of Wales.

Surplus Capacity in Schools

Attached at Annex C also for information is data on surplus capacity in schools in Wales extracted from local authorities' published School Organisation Plans. This information is not directly comparable with all Wales statistics prepared by the Welsh Assembly Government Statistical Directorate.

ELL Minister's Statement to Plenary 25 June 2003

Attached at Annex D is the ELL Minister's statement to plenary on 25 June 2003 responding on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government to the ELL Committee's report on the School of the Future.