

Proposed Learning and Skills (Wales) Committee

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Response to Assembly Committee Consultation from Governors Wales

Evidence on the Proposed Learning and Skills Measure (Wales)

5th September 2008

1. Introduction

1.1. Governors Wales welcomes the opportunity to submit further written evidence on the proposed Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure.

1.2. The additional observations from Governors Wales will focus primarily on the questions noted by the Committee Chair, in addition to the comments submitted by Governors Wales on the initial consultation proposals in April 2008. (Appendix 1)

2. With regards to the questions which form the framework for the work of the Committee, Governors Wales offers the following response:

(i) Is there a need for legislation to re-organise 14-19 provision?

Legislation is needed on a major matter such as this to provide a proper legal framework. Widening the choice to include vocational skills should be a right for all learners. Schools should be given every encouragement to use the expertise available in FE Colleges and other schools in their area. Legislation may help to speed up a process that currently is making slow progress in some areas. The recent publication of "Skills That Work For Wales" document re-emphasises the urgent need to form learning partnerships for post-14 education to be 'upgraded'.

(ii) Does the proposed Measure achieve the policy objective or could changes be made without legislating?

The analysis in paragraph 7.4 of the Explanatory Memorandum sets out well why an Assembly Measure is needed to meet the policy objectives. The number of courses offered in each area needs to be carefully thought through to ensure learner needs are balanced with provider capability. A 'phased in' extended curriculum over two or three years will help to manage learner and WAG expectations and enable a strong partnership structure to be established.

(iii) What are the views of stakeholders who will have to work with the new arrangements?

Governors Wales believe that school governors want to do the best for their students within the new 14-19 arrangements, and are generally supportive of the Measure. Schools with 6th Forms are sensitive to the fact that 16+ learners can choose to go elsewhere and are increasingly working with other providers, such as FE Colleges, to offer a wider choice of subjects. This has a 'knock-on' effect for 14-16 education - if learners are offered a range of subjects that match their particular aspirations they are more likely to stay in education at 16, 18 and beyond.

(iv) What might be the barriers to delivering the policy agenda and does the proposed Measure take account of them?

A particular difficulty to overcome is the history of competition between secondary schools with 6th forms and Further Education Colleges. The way schools are funded goes some way to encourage them to 'protect their investment' in the 16-18 cohort. There are also geographical, logistical and financial difficulties for some schools in arranging transport to and from sites remote from their campus. Funding will also have to take account of this. The Measure does what is feasible to take account of this. However, the more that people become used to working together under the new arrangements the better things should become.

Time-tabling can also be a problem, with some schools already partnering running into problems with time-tables that are off-set. Common time-tables will be a challenge for school partnerships.

There is a need for impartial career advice at Key Stage 3, when most learners are choosing their options. Anecdotal evidence suggests a heavy emphasis on the academic routes may be as a result of a lack of knowledge of what is available from vocational subjects. Again, stronger partnership working, particularly with FE Colleges, should at least partly address this issue.

No mention is made of what is to happen if schools fail to deliver the desired broader curriculum? Will it be included in future Estyn inspections?

Conclusion

Governors Wales believes that the changes made following the consultation exercise seem to address concerns raised. In particular there needs to be flexibility in defining the local curriculum areas. Number and type of courses offered may need to be tailored to local need, e.g. rural versus urban industrial requirements.

