

**Date:** Wednesday 9 July 2003  
**Time:** 9.30am  
**Venue:** Committee Rooms 3&4, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

**Members**

Peter Black (Chair)  
Jane Davidson (Minister)  
Leighton Andrews  
Jeff Cuthbert  
David Davies  
Mark Isherwood  
Irene James  
Denise Idris Jones  
Helen Mary Jones  
Owen John Thomas

**Constituency**

South Wales West  
Pontypridd  
Rhondda  
Caerphilly  
Monmouth  
North Wales  
Islwyn  
Conwy  
Mid and West Wales  
South West Central

**Officials**

Richard Davies  
Elizabeth Taylor

Director, DfTE  
Head, Schools Management

Peter Jones

Assembly Counsel to Committees

**Also in Attendance:**

Professor Steve Bristow  
Gari Lewis  
Alasdair MacLaughlin

Open Direction Ltd

**Committee Secretariat**

Chris Reading  
Holly Pembrige

Clerk  
Deputy Clerk

**Item One: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.
- 1.2 There were no apologies or substitutions.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of interest in accordance with standing order 4.5.

## **Item Two: Minister's Report (9.40am-10.20am)**

- **Paper: ELL(2) 02-03(p.1) and Annexes**

2.1 The Chair asked the Minister to introduce item 13 - 'The Disability Discrimination (Prescribed Periods for Accessibility Strategies and Plans for Schools) (Wales) Regulations 2003, which had been referred by Business Committee. After a brief discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the regulations without amendment, so as not to cause delay to their implementation.

2.2 The Chair invited Members to inform the Clerk of any items of secondary legislation that they wished to consider in the autumn term. The Minister referred Members to three new items of proposed legislation: The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (Wales) Regulations 2003; The Education (Specified Work and Registration (Wales) 2003; and The General Teaching Council for Wales (functions) (Amendment) Regulations 2003.

2.3 The following issues were raised in discussion:

### **Schools Capital/Maintenance**

- The Minister acknowledged Members' concerns about some LEAs retaining too much of the education funding and not passing this to schools. The Minister explained that LEAs were responsible for allocating funds to schools. The Minister stated that from 2005 the Assembly would provide a one-off payment of £9m to each LEA for improvements to school buildings.

### **Assembly Learning Grants (ALGs)**

- In response to a question from Helen Mary Jones, the Minister agreed to write to the Chair giving an explanation for the poor take-up of the ALG and setting out proposed action to address this problem. The Minister stated that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) would be providing new advice to all benefit agency offices in August 2003. The Minister undertook to provide all Committee Members with a hard copy of the ALG regulations.

### **Enterprise in Education**

- Jeff Cuthbert informed the Committee that a team of students from Ystrad Mynach College had recently represented Wales in the Enterprise Olympics in Glasgow and had come second in the innovation section. The Committee congratulated the team on their achievement.

### **Work Related Education (WRE)**

- Members broadly welcomed WRE but felt that more should be done to monitor the quality of the work experience provided. The Minister agreed and stated that she had invited Careers Wales and ELWa to develop a

quality mark.

### **Devolution of Student Support**

- The Minister confirmed that the financial consequences of not introducing top-up fees in Wales would be met from the block grant. Leighton Andrews asked about the availability of research into prospective student preferences for higher education. The Minister said that her officials were actively looking into this matter.

### **PE and School Sport Action Plan for Wales**

- There was some concern that some small primary schools were losing time from their PE lessons, as they had to convert their multi-use halls for the purpose of games. The Minister emphasised that the work of the development centres would help to improve PE and school sport and drew attention to the £48 million New Opportunities Fund programme. More generally, where the suitability of facilities was an issue, local authorities could use their capital monies to develop such provision.

### **Teachers' Upper Pay Spine Threshold**

- The Minister was asked if local authorities were distributing resources on the basis of local formulae that might leave some schools unable to meet the cost of teachers' advancement to the upper pay spine. The Minister said that local authorities could hold back funds centrally for this purpose. The school budget forums would also ensure that accurate, up-to-date information would be available. The Chair informed the Committee that there would be a substantive agenda item concerning school budget forums at the next meeting on 17 July.

### **Investors in People**

- The Minister confirmed that schools were encouraged to achieve Investors in People (IiP) status.

### **Action Points**

- **The Clerk to report to Plenary confirming that the Committee had approved the Disability Discrimination (Prescribed Periods for Accessibility Strategies and Plans for Schools) (Wales) Regulations 2003, in accordance with standing order 22.7.**
- **The Minister to write to the Chair outlining the likely reasons for poor take-up of the ALG and any proposed action.**
- **The Minister to provide Committee Members with a hard copy of the ALG regulations.**
- **Minister's officials to investigate the availability of research into student preferences for higher education and report back to Committee.**
- **Funky Dragon audited accounts to be sent to David Davies.**

**Item Three: Local Authority Budgets set for Education Services 2003-2004  
Paper: ELL(2) 02-03(p.2)**

3.1 The Minister introduced this item and stated that the increase in education spend over the last three years had outstripped that in England. The Minister acknowledged that there was still an issue with regards to the highest and lowest spending authorities. The figures were nationally agreed and nationally comparable.

3.2 Members welcomed the 9.1% increase in schools' budgets. Members asked whether the increase covered fixed costs such as National Insurance contributions and pensions. The Minister replied that these costs had been reflected in the overall local government settlement. The Minister undertook to provide a note for Committee on National Insurance costs for local authorities.

3.3 The Minister stated that Sue Essex (Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services) was actively supporting the Wales Programme for Improvement Inspections of local authorities, to examine allocation of resources.

**Action Point**

- **The Minister to provide a note for Committee on National Insurance costs for local authorities.**

**Item Four: ACCAC Quinquennial Review  
Paper: ELL(2) 02-03 and Report to Committee**

4.1 The Chair welcomed Professor Steve Bristow, Gari Lewis and Alasdair MacLaughlin to the meeting. Professor Bristow outlined the process of the review to the Committee.

4.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members considered the response rate to the consultation from schools and colleges in particular to be relatively small. Professor Bristow explained that the majority of responses to date had been from agencies that were key partners of ACCAC, e.g. Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Learning and Teaching Scotland, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), amongst others. Consultation did not finish until Friday of that week and he did not rule out more responses by then.
- Members welcomed engagement with members of the Council of the Confederation of Business and Industry (CBI) Wales and suggested that this approach be pursued with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Wales and the Institute of Directors Wales. Professor Bristow stated that he expected responses to be received from both organisations.

- Presenters were asked if they would consider the extent to which ACCAC was able to promote crosscutting themes as set out in the Government of Wales Act and ministerial remit letters.
- The Committee considered that ACCAC's functions were likely to be even more necessary, in light of proposed curriculum changes.
- The need for many separate bodies undertaking related or overlapping functions was questioned. Helen Mary Jones said that Plaid Cymru had undertaken research on this issue and would be content to supply this information to consultants, when available. Jeff Cuthbert indicated that he was content with the current arrangements.

4.3 Professor Bristow invited Members to respond individually to the consultation, if they so wished. The Chair thanked presenters and reminded the Committee that the consultants would return in the autumn with their final report.

### **Item Five: Budget Planning Round 2003**

#### **Paper: ELL(2) 02-03(p.4) and Annexes**

5.1 The Minister introduced this item.

5.2 After discussion, the Committee determined that its main priorities were:

- Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- Ensuring provision was available for implementation of the National Agreement on Teacher Workload;
- Teacher training through the medium of Welsh - with particular reference to early years settings; and
- Iaith Pawb - a national action plan for a bilingual Wales.

5.3 The Committee also wished to see continued support for:

- Further Education (FE) lecturers' pay; and
- Student support and access funds, including ALG and hardship grants

5.4 The Chair reminded the Committee that there would be an opportunity for further discussion in the autumn term. The Chair would write to the Minister confirming the Committee's priorities for the budget planning round. This letter would be circulated to Members in advance - for comment.

#### **Action Point**

- **Chair to write to Minister outlining the Committee's budget priorities.**

### **Item Six: Policy Review: Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

#### **Paper: ELL(2) 02-03(p.5)**

6.1 The Committee broadly accepted the proposals set out in the paper, subject to the following comments:

- Terms of reference for the first review to refer to the SEN Code of Practice and also the supply and training of speech therapists;
- Welsh-medium provision of SEN provision to be incorporated in the terms of reference for the other three topic areas;
- Young people with SEN to be invited to participate in the review;
- ACCAC, Autism Cymru and the Special Needs Advisory Service to be included in the consultation process;
- The terms of reference regarding primary and secondary transition to be amended to include transition between each sector of education and training and to focus on how agencies collaborate with each other.

6.2 The Committee was content with the priorities set out in paragraph 2.1 and the programme set out in paragraph 3.1.

6.3 The Committee agreed that the Clerk should establish an external reference group to assist with the review.

6.4 The Committee agreed to invite the Health and Social Services Committee to nominate a representative to participate in the review.

#### **Action Points**

- **The Chair to invite the Health and Social Services Committee to participate in the review.**
- **The Clerk to amend the terms of reference.**
- **The Clerk to set up an external reference group.**
- **The Clerk to draw up proposals for a written consultation in the autumn.**

#### **Item Seven: Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Paper: ELL(2) 01-03(mins)**

7.1 The Committee ratified the minutes of the meeting on 18 June 2003.

7.2 The Minister undertook to expedite outstanding actions.

#### **Other Business**

##### **Paper to Note: Current version of the Committee's detailed forward work programme**

**Paper: ELL(2) 02-03(p.6)**

The Chair explained that the autumn forward work programme was provisional and the issue of taking up optional additional slots would be discussed at the first party spokespersons' meeting in the autumn.