

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 22 October 2003
 Time: 9.30am - 12.30pm
 Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Members	Constituency
Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
Jane Davidson (Minister)	Pontypridd
Leighton Andrews	Rhondda
Jeff Cuthbert	Caerphilly
David Davies	Monmouth
Irene James	Islwyn
Mark Isherwood	North Wales
Denise Idris Jones	Conwy
Ieuan Wyn Jones	Ynys Môn
Owen John Thomas	South West Central
Officials	
Richard Davies	Group Director, Department for Training and Education
Elizabeth Taylor	Head, Schools Management Division
Mike Harper	Head, Teaching and Leadership Division
Judith Cole	Central Support Unit
Alan Lansdown	Head, Pupil Support Division, Department for Training and Education
Mair Watkins	Pupil Support Division, Department for Training and Education
Committee Secretariat	
Chris Reading	Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Clerk
Ruth Hatton	Committee Support Officer

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

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.

1.2 The Chair noted an apology from Helen Mary Jones. Ieuan Wyn Jones substituted.

1.3 There were no declarations of interest.

Item Two: Minister's Report

Paper: ELL(2) 06-03(p.1) and Annexes

2.1 The Minister introduced her report and made the following introductory remarks:

- National Council-ELWa had invested an additional £33m for work-based learning in Wales.
- A written Cabinet statement concerning Rathbone Training's decision to restructure work based learning operations in Wales, would be made available to Members. This can be found on the National Assembly website.

2.2 The Chair then invited Members to raise questions and the following issues were raised in discussion:

Rathbone Training

Some Members were concerned that there appeared to be a more adversarial relationship between NC-ELWa and training providers compared with other parts of the UK. Members felt that in future NC-ELWa should aim to achieve partnership working with its training providers. The Committee did not wish this to become a party political matter. In response to Members' concerns, the Minister said that NC-ELWa would ensure that every learner affected would be provided with appropriate training. The Minister stated that NC-ELWa intended that its internal audit team would assess the relevant financial data, subject to agreement by Rathbone Training. The Minister also stated that NC-ELWa would provide additional funding of £450, 000 for 'on programme payments'. The Minister undertook to invite NC-ELWa to write to Committee Members setting out its response to Rathbone Training's decision to restructure its operations in Wales.

Student Support

There was some concern that that the introduction of variable fees in the UK could impact negatively on universities in Wales. Some Members were concerned that university lecturers in Wales could be attracted elsewhere in the UK, and that this would have a detrimental effect on universities in Wales. The Minister explained that the newly established stakeholder Project Board, in conjunction with the review that would be undertaken with Professor Teresa Rees, would consider all issues regarding student support. The Minister said that the Committee would have the opportunity to address these issues with the Under-Secretary of State for Wales at a future meeting, where there would be an opportunity to discuss the passage of the student support bill and scrutinise the draft legislation.

Initial Teacher Training Scoping Study

The Minister confirmed that the initial scoping study would determine what issues must be considered in a more extensive study on initial teacher training provision in Wales. Issues surrounding the provision of

Welsh-medium and Welsh second language teachers were addressed in the Iaith Pawb - Bilingual Action Plan for Wales.

Exclusion Guidance

It was felt that the safety of teachers should be taken into account when formulating such guidance. The Minister explained that the consultation on the guidance proposed that a third option be available for appeals panels: that pupils be transferred to a different school. The Minister stated that appeals panels would be required to balance the interests of pupils with that of the whole school community. Guidance on teachers' safety was included in Circular 3/99, which was currently being updated.

Memorandum of Understanding with New South Wales

The Minister was asked about the merits of Wales having a memorandum of understanding with New South Wales. The Minister explained that Australia and Wales had similar education systems but the Australian education system currently outperformed that in Wales. The Minister felt that Wales could learn some valuable lessons from Australia. The Minister stated that Australia was a popular destination for exchange with teachers from Wales because the education system was familiar yet offered a different experience.

Secondary Legislation

The Committee had previously indicated that it wished to consider the following pieces of secondary legislation:

- The LEA Budget, Schools Budget and Individual Schools Budget (Wales) Regulations 2003;
- The School Budget Shares (Wales) Regulations; and
- The LEA Financial Schemes (Wales) Regulations.

2.3 The Committee confirmed that it was content for the three items of secondary legislation to proceed to plenary as outlined in the explanatory memoranda.

2.4 Owen John Thomas asked for the Minister to include Iaith Pawb regularly in her reports to Committee.

Item Three: Policy Review of Special Educational Needs - Issues Paper

Paper: ELL(20 06-03(p.2)

3.1 The Chair invited Members to consider an issues paper prepared by the Pupil Support Division of the Department for Training and Education.

3.2 The Chair invited the Minister to make some introductory remarks, which are summarised as follows:

- It would be helpful if the Committee would consider the statementing system during the course of the review as there had been an increase in the number of statements issued to pupils. In January 2003, 17,521 young people aged 0-19 were in receipt of a statement. The Audit Commission's report on the statementing process (2002) had emphasised that this process was expensive and that these resources could be better spent on delivery. The report also stated that in some cases, statements failed to provide for individual needs;
- There was often tension between the health and education sectors because Health Services provided the training and supply of health professionals, whilst local education authorities (LEAs) had a statutory responsibility to ensure that appropriate provision was in place;
- The consultation on speech and language services 'Working Together' was due to end the following week and findings were eagerly awaited;
- The Wales Advisory Group for Special Educational Needs (WAGSEN) steering group would review the current progress on recommendations of the Audit Commission Report regarding statementing and report to WAGSEN's full group in early December; and
- Wales now had its own SEN Tribunal as a result of the Education Act 2002 and 22 cases had already been referred to it.

3.3 The Chair then invited Members to comment and the following issues were raised:

Terminology

The Chair stated that at the reference group meeting the previous day, Gareth Foulkes of the Disability Rights Commission had suggested that the Committee might wish to consider adopting the terminology 'additional educational needs' as opposed to special educational needs. Also, the term 'individual educational needs' was put forward.

Provision for Hearing Impaired Children

In response to a question from a Member, the Minister stated that guidance concerning the provision for hearing impaired children aged between 0 and 2 years and 2 years and above was due to be launched on 6 December. Guidance on provision for visual impairment would follow. The Minister said that this guidance would contribute to the development of an all-Wales approach.

Inclusive Schools

It was felt that in order to facilitate inclusive schools there was a need for managers to have the key skill of 'management of change'. The Minister told the Committee that a consultation document on draft guidance for 'Inclusive Education' had been issued for consultation. The Minister said that the reference group might wish to consider this document. The Minister said she had been pleased to attend the launch

of the Welsh Index for Inclusion for schools in Wales on 9 October.

School Budgets

Some Members felt that some LEAs sometimes transferred funding from core school budgets to meet the costs associated with the increase in the number of statements.

3.4 The Chair asked for the Committee to be supplied with the following documents:

- Audit Commission Report: Statutory Assessment and Statements of SEN - In Need of Review? (2002);
- Health and Social Services Committee Report: Review of Services for Children with Special Health Needs; and
- Welsh Assembly Government's draft consultation on guidance for Inclusive Education.

Item Four: Draft Budget

Paper: ELL(2) 06-03(p.3)

4.1 During Members' questions and discussion, the following issues were raised:

Local Authorities' Fixed Costs

David Davies and Ieuan Wyn Jones asked for clarification regarding the level of fixed costs (teacher workload agreement, teachers' pension and the Disability Discrimination Act) that local authorities were obliged to meet. The Minister stated that these matters were factored into the overall budget.

Education-Related Expenditure in Other Parts of the Budget

Members asked for clarification on items of education-related expenditure contained elsewhere in the overall budget. The Minister stated that the Finance Minister regularly discussed local government funding with officials from local authorities. The Minister pointed out that most local government funding was not hypothecated. Members acknowledged this fact but asked the Minister to examine means of clarifying education and lifelong learning expenditure in the overall budget, in discussion with Cabinet colleagues.

Comparison with England

Ieuan Wyn Jones referred to recent reports by Professor David Reynolds (National Association of Headteachers), Jeff Jones (Welsh Local Government Association) and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales regarding expenditure on education in Wales compared with that in England. These

reports indicated that relevant expenditure was proportionally in real terms, some 2% lower in Wales. The Minister replied that these figures were based on estimates and it was more important to take account of the actual outturn figures. Statistics comparing expenditure in local education authorities in England and Wales would be presented to the Committee early in the New Year.

Student Access Funds

There was some concern that there was an apparent reduction in funding and Members asked if outturn figures were available. The Minister stated that these were not yet available but anticipated that they would be available in December.

Youth Initiatives

Members asked why there was an increase in proposed funding for youth initiatives. The Minister stated that the youth initiatives were related to the statutory delivery of the extending entitlement agenda.

Pilot Grants for 16-19 Year Olds in England

The Chair enquired whether similar grants would be available in Wales. The Minister replied that she hoped to make a statement on this matter in due course.

Assembly Learning Grant (ALG)

The Chair asked if the eligibility criteria would be reviewed with a view to improving take-up of the grant. The Minister replied that the ALG was proving successful for learners from disadvantaged areas and confirmed that the eligibility criteria were constantly under review.

£151m Increase in Local Government Funding

Members questioned what this funding covered. The Minister replied that the Finance Minister would make a statement the following day on this matter.

Funding for Specific Initiatives (e.g. Iaith Pawb, Raising Standards and Reducing Class Sizes)

Members were interested to know where funding was allocated in the education and lifelong learning budget for specific initiatives. Judith Cole (DfTE) answered Members' specific concerns.

Special Grants

The Minister undertook to provide Members with a table of education-related special grants.

Definition of Rural/Small School

Leighton Andrews and David Davies asked if there was an agreed definition of a small and/or rural school. The Minister replied that there was not. The Minister referred to an Audit Commission definition for a small school that related to schools of 90 pupils or less. The Minister accepted that the rural and small schools grant could be more accurately described as a 'small schools grant'.

Summary

The Chair stated that he would be writing to the Minister to confirm the main points raised by Members in this discussion. These points were agreed as:

- Note that the Minister had taken account of the Committee's priorities as set out in its letter of 16 July 2003;
- Members wanted the Minister, in discussion with Cabinet colleagues to examine a means of identifying education funding relating to the statutory responsibilities of local authorities in the overall budget; and
- The Committee looked forward to the outcome of the review into student support headed by Professor Teresa Rees.

4.2 The Chair thanked the Minister and her officials for providing Members with an explanation of the budget.

Any Other Business

- The Chair congratulated David Davies on his forthcoming wedding;
- Jeff Cuthbert asked if the Welsh Joint Education Committee could be invited to a future meeting. The Chair noted this request and said that this would be discussed at the next party spokespersons meeting.

Action Points

- Minister to provide a written statement on Rathbone Training's decision to restructure work based learning operations in Wales;
- Minister to invite NC-ELWa to write to Committee Members setting out its proposed response to the decision by Rathbone Training to restructure work based learning operations in Wales;
- Reference Group and Committee to be provided with a copy of the 'Inclusive Education' consultation document;
- Committee to be provided with Audit Commission report on statementing process and copy of the Health and Social Services Committee's report on Children with Special Health Needs;
- Clerk to provide Members with details concerning the Committee's visit to North Wales on 6 November;

- Minister to provide Committee with a schedule of education-related special grants;
- Minister to regularly update Committee on progress on implementation of Iaith Pawb action plan in Ministerial Report.