

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Date: 16 June 2004

Time: 9.30 am

Venue: Committee Room 1, Cardiff Bay

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. Coleg Gwent

Members are aware of Coleg Gwent's proposals for organisational change and have seen copies of Sheila Drury's response to my letter of 11 May.

ELWa is aware of the concerns of members, AMs, and MPs, and has been working closely with Coleg Gwent to assess the appropriateness and proportionality of the college's proposals, and how they match up to the needs of learners, employers and communities across Gwent. It is continuing to do so and will want to ensure that proper account is taken of concerns raised during the consultation. ELWa is also working with local CCETs and the wider provider network in the area to ensure their views are fully considered.

I expect to receive a full report from ELWa shortly. I will be able to update members at that time.

2. The Organisational Model For Post-16 Learning

The focus for the future, across all elements of post 16 provision, must be on the capacity of ELWa and its learning provider networks to respond to the needs of learners and their communities, the needs of employers, and the wider imperatives for Wales set out in the policies of the Assembly Government, building on the National Assembly for Wales' endorsement of the ETAG proposals for the establishment of ELWa as the strategic body for post 16 education on 19th September 2000. Further Education Institutions are well positioned to build on their achievements and play a full part in that process.

Members will be aware that the Assembly's Audit Committee recommended that the Assembly examine whether the current model for the Further Education sector of colleges as independent self governing bodies remains appropriate. The Assembly Government accepted the relevant recommendation and gave a firm commitment to keep the appropriateness of the existing arrangements under review. This we shall continue to do.

3. Widening Participation Agenda

Widening participation is central to the Assembly Government's policy as set out in The Learning Country and is fundamental to the development of post 16 provision. FE colleges have a major role in taking this agenda forward and ELWa's recurrent funding formula for colleges already includes a specific weighting factor for this aspect of their work. We have also taken significant steps to break down financial obstacles to learning. The Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) was the first grant of its kind in the UK to be made available to FE students. Low income students aged 18 and over can access the ALG, and an additional £7m is made available for the FE sector to make discretionary awards to students who do not qualify for the ALG or who need additional support. From this autumn, the new means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance of up to £30 a week will be available to 16 year old students and extended to 17 year olds next autumn and to 18 year olds the following year.

4. WBL Tendering Process

ELWa invited 126 training organisations, selected on the basis of a pre-qualification questionnaire completed before Christmas, to submit tenders for Work Based Learning contracts. The tender exercise has proceeded smoothly and to plan. The Wales Procurement Initiative Team (WPIT) has conducted "Gateway Reviews" as the tender process has progressed and these have provided an independent check on procedures and propriety. ELWa considered tender submissions and on 3 June informed 120 tenderers that their bids had been accepted. I understand that ELWa will advise tenderers of allocated volumes in mid June. New contracts will begin in August 2004 and run until August 2005.

5. Report On How LEAs Have Utilised The Special Grant For Small And Rural Schools 2003-2004.

Background

- The purpose of this grant was to support the development of innovative ways of delivering education, particularly in rural settings, and to facilitate the community use of school buildings (in all areas). It was also intended to assist with reducing the administrative burden in schools, particularly in smaller schools where Headteachers have a significant classroom teaching commitment.
- The grant was introduced following consideration by the ELL Committee of a paper on rural and small schools which the Minister presented on 31 October 2001. This paper in turn drew on a

Welsh Local Government Association Task and Finish Group report on the issues relating to small schools. These papers concluded that existing patterns of school provision in Wales often did not match the needs of the 21st century, with significant amounts of surplus capacity, relatively large numbers of small schools with disproportionately high per pupil costs and many school buildings in poor condition and with inadequate facilities. LEAs needed to implement strategies to get a better fit between provision and local needs. In some instances this would mean school reorganisations and closures: in others new ways of working together could help rural schools deliver the full range of educational opportunities more effectively to their pupils.

- It was recognised that some additional funding might facilitate schools in developing innovative schemes and relieve the additional administrative burdens arising from new ways of working and building community links with schools. The specific terms of the grant were deliberately drawn quite widely to encompass a range of schemes and local needs.
- Special Grant Reports have been approved in each of the last three years. In the first year (2002-03) £2m was provided. This rose to £3.5m in the second year (2003-04). A further grant of £3.5m has been agreed for 2004-05. The grant is allocated between authorities by means of a formula which is based mainly on the rurality of the area, but also takes into account the level of deprivation and the number of small schools in each authority. 70% of the grant is distributed by reference to a sparsity index (that is the size of the population who live outside settlements of a size sufficient to support a school i.e. 1000 for the primary element and 7500 for the secondary element), 20% by reference to the number of small schools in the Authority area and 10% on the basis of deprivation. The number of small schools has been calculated by using the Audit Commission's definition of a 'small' school being one with fewer than 90 pupils in a primary school and fewer than 600 pupils in a secondary school (700 for a secondary school with a sixth form). The deprivation indicator used was the number of pupils who are entitled to receive free school meals.
- The terms of the Special Grant Report simply specify the various purposes to which the grant may be put.
- Local authorities have used the considerable degree of flexibility and discretion given to them under the grant conditions to utilise the extra funding in a variety of different ways. In the first year, a number of authorities gave all or part of their allocations to support the increased community use of schools. Many provided schools with additional funding for administrative support particularly where schools were considered small. A few allocated funding to support specific clustering or federation projects and several also used their allocation to develop school IT links.
- In the light of this encouraging experience in the first year, similar arrangements were made for the second year of grant, with funds distributed by means of the same formula and the specified purposes of the grant were also unchanged.

- As before, a guidance letter was issued to local authorities at the time that the payments for 2003-04 were made. This included a reference to another special grant which had been introduced in that year to support the teacher workload agreement and made the suggestion that authorities might " wish to consider whether to use a proportion of the funding available ... together with the allocation arising from Special Grant Report No 2 [the teacher workload grant] to ensure that schools can achieve the aim of relieving teachers and headteachers of routine administrative tasks".

Analysis of Expenditure 2003-04

- Three authorities spent all or most of their allocations to support federation pilots, clustering or some form of collaboration between schools. Five others spent smaller amounts for this purpose.
- Three authorities allocated all or the majority of their share of funding to projects supporting and promoting the community use of school buildings.
- Two authorities spent their grant allocations on improving IT links, connecting primary schools to broadband and providing hardware and support to maximise the use of the infrastructure. One other authority invested part of its grant to develop ICT for Learning in specific schools.
- Five authorities added the total allocation they received under SGR13 (the innovation grant) to that given under SGR2 (the workload grant). The resulting sum was then paid out to schools for the purpose of providing administrative support to reduce the burdens on teaching staff and headteachers. Four of the five weighted the formula of distribution so that smaller schools (whose heads might be expected to have significant teaching commitments) received the greatest benefit. In the case of the other authority, the money was distributed on a lump sum per school/ per pupil basis. Because that Authority contains a large number of rural and small schools, the vast majority of the funding went to small schools with teaching heads.
- Four other authorities added a significant proportion of their allocations to SGR2 and distributed it to schools on an unweighted basis for the purpose of providing administrative support. In all of these cases, the authorities contain a high proportion of small primary schools or primary schools with a teaching head, therefore these were the main beneficiaries.
- Five local authorities, whilst not formally adding their allocations under SGR 13 to those under SGR 2, nevertheless distributed all or much of their funding to schools for the purpose of providing additional administrative support. In all cases, smaller schools (i.e. those most likely to have a head with a significant teaching commitment) were given priority.
- Other minor uses to which SGR 13 funding was put by authorities included the employment of a data analyst to reduce the administrative burden on schools arising from the collection and analysis of data, and the setting up of an 'E' Teacher Electronic Supply Teacher System which

again will help reduce administrative burdens.

- Although nine authorities elected to use their allocations under SGR 13 alongside SGR No 2, the grant available for SGR 13 can be identified separately from LEA reports. Reports on the use of the funding in 2003/04 were considered before 2004/05 funding was released to individual authorities. The table at Annex B attached sets out the position for each authority.

Conclusion

- Although more emphasis was placed by authorities in 2003-04 on using the grant to relieve administrative burdens than in the previous year, the number of innovative schemes supported by the grant was broadly the same. I am satisfied that the funding provided to local authorities under Special Grant Report No 13 was properly spent in accordance with the terms of the Grant. The Grant Report conditions do not require that funding should be spent only in small and rural schools. Nevertheless, such schools were the principal beneficiaries.

6. UK Presidency of the European Union - youth event

The United Kingdom will hold the Presidency of the European Union during the second half of 2005. In this context the Department for Education and Skills is planning a programme of events that will help progress the UK's policy aims for the Presidency.

Given that I have previously represented the UK on youth issues at European Council of Ministers' meetings I am very pleased to report that the Welsh Assembly Government has been successful in its bid to host the youth event during the UK Presidency.

This event will bring together young people, youth workers and policy makers from all 25 member states to discuss key issues on the European youth agenda like participation, information and volunteering. The aim of this event will be to inform decision-making in the field and promote European co-operation and exchange.

It will present an opportunity to promote the excellent work happening here in Wales, and help further raise our awareness of, and involvement in, the European youth agenda.

I will keep you informed as plans evolve.

7. Review Of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Provision

The Committee will be aware that last year we commissioned a scoping study to look at the how a review of the provision for ITT – that is, how intake targets, courses and course availability can deliver teachers with Qualified Teacher Status to better meet the needs of maintained schools in Wales – could be organised. The scoping study has been undertaken by Mr Mike Haines of Optima Learning and his

report is attached at Annex C.

The scoping study concludes that there is strong case for a full review of ITT provision in Wales. The study's recommendations on how a review ought to be undertaken are contained in part 3 (paragraph 86 onwards).

The scoping study is long and covers a lot of ground. Because of the various detailed issues which need to be examined (particularly the resource issues, both financial and manpower), I have asked for some detailed work to be undertaken focussing on individual areas such as the type of review model to be used, the terms of reference, leadership and membership; and timing.

However, on the overall approach to be adopted, I am minded to take the view that:-

- a full review of ITT provision in Wales should be organised as soon as practicable
- the type of review model to be used should be on the lines of the Daugherty Assessment Review Group, set up to look at the assessment and testing arrangements for 11 and 14 year-olds in Wales.
- the terms of reference should be tightly focused on the issues relating to ITT provision – how can we better estimate the numbers of teachers needed in maintained schools in Wales, by phase, subject and language; and how do we provide for that in ITT in Wales.

The detailed work I have asked to be undertaken will look at exactly how this approach can be organised. I expect to be able to announce these details in the Autumn.

8. Devolution of Student Support and HE Bill

The Devolution of Student Support project is progressing well. The main priority for the Project Team remains to ensure that the HE Bill receives Royal Assent in the Summer to allow the over-arching Project to proceed including the Finance and Information Project and the Independent Study "Rees Review" chaired by Professor Teresa Rees.

- HE Bill

The Higher Education Bill received Second Reading in the House of Lords on 19 April. The proceedings of the debate are available on the parliamentary website at:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199900/ldhansrd/pdvn/lds04/text/40419-04.htm#40419-04_head2

The Bill has completed its consideration in Committee in the House of Lords. Report and third reading follow – report stage was on 8th and 14th June.

- Providing a bilingual student support system - Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group held its second meeting on 19 May. The meeting considered how the student support process is currently communicated to students and options for bilingual communications from Academic Year 2006/07.

- Rees Review Update

The membership for Independent Study - Devolution of Student Support System and Tuition Fee Regime to Wales, headed by Professor Teresa Rees, has been confirmed. Formal letters of invitation were sent to all panel members on the 07 May 2004. A press release was issued on 19 May 2004 detailing membership.

http://www.wales.gov.uk/servlet/PressReleaseBySubject?area_code=37D4D35C000B6B0C000005D400000000&module=dynamicpages

9. Higher Education and Economic Development Task and Finish Group

Members will wish to note that the final report of the higher education and economic development task and finish group, Knowledge Economy Nexus, was published on 11 June. A copy of the report is available on the Internet on Friday 11 June at

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/subitradeindustry/content/know-econ-nexus-e.pdf>

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/subitradeindustry/content/know-econ-nexus-w.pdf>

10. The PE and School Sport Initiative. Estyn Report on Progress.

Estyn have provided regular reports on the implementation of the PE and School Sport Action Initiative which is being taken forward by the Sports Council for Wales (SCW) for the Welsh Assembly Government. The initiative aims to establish Development Centres in each local authority area drawing together a cluster of schools with local partners to pilot innovative approaches to improving opportunities for PE and school sport and to raise standards. There are also a number of supporting projects including work to improve the opportunities provided for teachers for continuing professional development. The last Estyn report, in March 2003, concluded that, although the Development Centres (DCs) were still in their infancy, the initiative had made a good start and was having a positive impact on standards in schools.

This latest assessment, commissioned through Estyn's remit for 2003-04, reports on progress in the first full year of the project. Based on findings from visits to Development Centres, interviews with headteachers, teachers and pupils the report concludes that the initiative is having a significant impact on

the quality of provision. In particular, it is extending the range of opportunities in schools and improving the standards achieved by pupils in physical education. Estyn concluded that:

- primary school standards, particularly in gymnastics and dance, have improved considerably;
- secondary participation rates, particularly those of girls, have increased;
- development centre secondary schools now systematically plan to share their facilities with their partner primary schools;
- the focus on transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is leading to shared schemes and bridging units in a range of curricula activities;
- the involvement and partnership with Dragon Sports is very good. Improving partnerships with the Welsh network of healthy school scheme co-ordinators are leading to most schools working towards WNHSS accreditation.

The report also notes the firm ties established by SCW with local authorities in the establishment of the 34 Development Centres. All local authorities have now appointed a PE and school sport co-ordinator to support DCs and to ensure that good practice is made available to other schools. The report notes that the nature of SCW's links with the Development Centres is changing as a result of the new appointments. There is a need to ensure that ongoing attention is given to definition of roles and agreement of funding lines so that best use is made of the expertise and resources. The Council has noted this and has set up a further round of meetings with local authorities to consider the issues set out in the report.

Overall, very good progress has been made and I have agreed that, as planned, a further £1.5m will be made available for this initiative in 2004-05. This will enable 44 Development Centres to be put in place – two in each local authority area - by March 2005. With regard to funding for 2005-06, I met, recently, with Philip Carling, Chair of SCW, to discuss progress and plans. It was agreed that officials would work with the Council to present the case for further funding as part of the current spending review.

A paper setting out the background to the PE and School Sports Initiative and summarising progress is attached for your information at Annex D. The Estyn report has been published on the Inspectorate's web-site at www.estyn.gov.uk

Annex A

MINISTERS ENGAGEMENTS – 19th May to 15th June 2004

19th May

SPCH - Autism Cymru's first International Conference (City Hall, Cardiff)

20th May

VISIT - Airbus UK, Broughton (Broughton, North Wales)

SPCH/PRESENT - Ysgol Ardudwy's Annual Prize-Giving Day (Harlech, Gwynedd)

DINNER - Hon Stephanie Key MP Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education & Minister for Youth & Minister for the Status of Women (La Fosse, Cardiff)

21st May

SPCH - Brynnau Primary School's Centenary Ball (Brynnau, Rhondda Cynnon Taff)

24th May

MTG - Eleri Wynn from the BBC (Cardiff Bay) re education service

MTG - Andrew Davies and John Pockett CPT Wales (Cardiff Bay)

MTG - British Youth Council and Funky Dragon (Cardiff Bay)

MTG - Mrs Hart, ELWa (Chair and Chief Exec) and the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (Cardiff Bay)

MTG - WDA, ELWa, HEFCW and Andrew Davies AM (Cardiff Bay)

26th May

SPCH - Fforwm Annual Conference (Hilton Hotel, Cardiff)

VISIT - Penyfai Church in Wales Primary School (Bridgend)

27th May

SPCH / VISIT - Cwmcarn High School (Crosskeys)

SPCH - Presentation Event for the Modern Employment Skills for Steelworkers Project (Corus, Port Talbot)

ATTEND - Art, Media & Design Final Show - (University of Wales College, Newport – Caerleon Campus)

28th May

SPCH - Welsh Education Convention 2004 (CIA, Cardiff)

INTRVW - Programme for Radio Cymru that aims to look at bullying in Wales (Cardiff Bay)

01st June

SPCH - Open the exhibition of art by young people at the Hay Festival (Hay on Wye)

02nd June

ATTEND - Urdd Eisteddfod (Llangefni, Ynys Mon)

MTG - Young People's Advisory Panel (Beaufort Park Hotel, Mold)

05th June

SPCH - CYWU Conference (Caer Beris Hotel, Builth Wells)

07th June

MTG - James Knight to discuss his forthcoming tenure as President of NUS Wales (Cardiff Bay)

MTG - Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales (Cardiff Bay)

MTG - Equal Opportunities Commission Wales - Gender Segregation and in Training and Work (Cardiff Bay)

08th June

VISIT – Techniquest (Cardiff Bay)

09th June

SPCH - Conference for the Education of Visually Impaired Pupils (Thistle Hotel, Cardiff)

MTG - Group of Aberystwyth Guild of Students to discuss Higher Education funding & Welsh education (Cardiff Bay)

10th June

VISIT/SPCH - St John Lloyd Catholic Comprehensive (Llanelli)

VISIT - Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Bryniago (Swansea)

SPCH - Institute of Welsh Affairs' Luncheon Meeting - The Challenges of Education in Wales Today (Hilton Hotel, Cardiff)

14th June

SPCH - Children in Wales Event to celebrate Fathers Day (Glan Ely Discovery Centre, NMGW, Cardiff)

SPCH - Teaching Awards Ceremony in Wales (Millennium Stadium, Cardiff)

SPCH - Open new Careers Centre (Newport)

15th June

SPCH - Launch of CBI Education and Business Links Project (Cardiff Bay)