

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Date: 10 November 2004

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. A Report on How Sexual Health Education is Being Approached in Schools Through PSE

I recognise how important it is that young people are educated on a wide variety of issues including life skills and the wider environment, which will help develop them into more rounded individuals. This includes education on issues such as sexual health.

The Personal and Social Education framework has a key role to play in terms of developing and implementing whole-school policies and enabling pupils to discuss health and emotional issues. When planning how they are going to implement PSE, LEAs and schools will be guided by their local circumstances and priorities, and as such I am keen for these LEAs and schools to have the flexibility to deliver PSE in a way which suits their needs, at the same time taking on board shared best practices.

The importance of children's social and emotional growth, alongside their educational needs was reflected in my decision to make Personal and Social Education a statutory requirement within the basic curriculum for children aged 5 to 16 from September 2003.

The key elements of delivery of PSE for Key Stages 1-4 in Wales are set out in ACCACs "Personal and Social Education Framework". There are 10 aspects of PSE: social; community; physical; sexual; emotional; spiritual; moral; vocational; learning; and environment.

The sexual aspect explores the many aspects of sexuality and promotes responsible and healthy personal relationships. It includes family life, marriage, sexual behaviours, parenthood and sensitive issues such as abortion, information about growth and development, the processes of human reproduction and sexually transmitted infections.

The emotional aspect is also important in ensuring that young people examine and explore their feelings, develop self-awareness and self-respect and improve their self-esteem.

The Assembly continues to work with Estyn and ACCAC to ensure that the standard of delivery of PSE continues to develop and improve. We are in the process of reviewing the curriculum and the PSE framework will form part of that review.

In addition to the PSE Framework the Welsh Assembly also issued a guidance circular in July 2002 on Sex and Relationships Education in Schools. This guidance advises schools on how they should develop sex and relationships education policy, teach sex and relationships education, handle sensitive issues, and work with parents and the wider community.

Estyn have commenced a review of the implementation of this guidance and a report will be issued in the next few months. I await their findings with interest.

I would also like to draw your attention to the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship overarching policy for all young people, "Extending Entitlement" which is co-ordinated by 22 Young People's Partnerships (YPPs) across Wales. All of the YPPs are working to put in place arrangements for young people to access support, advice and learning opportunities they need as individuals.

The YPPs are expected to deliver 10 basic entitlements for young people and provide opportunities for our young people to develop holistically into confident adults - independent, able to make choices, able to participate in the democratic process. In 2004-05 one of the priorities for expenditure by YPP's from their special grant report is the area of sexual health for young people and innovative ways of providing services. Current indications suggest that out of a total of £660k available across the 22 YPP's approximately half will be spent on initiatives to take forward sexual health services for young people including sexual health advice.

The YPPs are working with a range of partners and young people in auditing provision, needs and resources and to support them in taking forward specific multi-agency projects. These projects must address at least one key area of need identified in the field of sexual health services and/or transport and must also evidence effective participation by children and young people.

2. Outdoor Learning/Education Outside the Classroom

I have agreed an allocation of £250,000 in 2004-05 for ContinYou including the development of a strategy in Wales for the long term sustainability of out of hours activities. They will also be discussing with certain Welsh Local Authorities ways in which they can assist in maintaining such projects which would otherwise be coming to the end of their New Opportunities Fund Funding.

We continue to support the Forest Schools concept and this approach, for instance, features in a number of the pilot projects we have approved for the introduction of the foundation phase.

More broadly, alternative provision is made by schools and LEAs to educate children of compulsory

school age who cannot go to school. It includes Pupil Referral Units, home tuition, hospital schools, behaviour support units, FE colleges and pregnant/young mothers units. LEAs should decide what is suitable education for a particular child in consultation with parents and according to the LEAs policies. Pupil Referral Units should offer a balanced and broadly based curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at schools and of society and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life.

The Assembly has provided funding to a specific out-of-school initiative as part of the £500,000 that we have made available over each of the last 3 years for pilot projects to tackle disaffection in schools. The project run by Skill Force develops the key skills of disaffected 14-16 year olds, providing links to alternative education opportunities and working with individual school's discipline systems. The project uses the experience of former Armed Forces officers as instructors and includes outdoor pursuits activities and work experience. The Assembly is also currently providing £190,000 over 3 years to support the roll-out of the Prince's Trust XL Project. This involves identifying groups of pupils who are in danger of disengagement and setting up clubs to provide them with support and essential skills to help maintain them in mainstream education. The project involves summer camps and other outdoor activities as a way of developing social interactions and self-esteem.

School Trips

Educational visits are an important part of the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities are an important supplement. Young people can benefit enormously from taking part in visits and other activities with their schools

The National Assembly issued guidance on the Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits in October 1999. It is available on the Assembly's internet site. The Guide is being revised and expanded and we shall be consulting local education authorities, schools, teacher unions and those running activity centres on revised guidance shortly.

Educational school visits help contribute to pupils understanding of the curriculum and bring subject matter to life as well as providing another dimension to teaching in the classroom. They also allow pupils to undergo experiences they may not otherwise have and help to develop their investigative skills and develop greater independence, particularly when taking part in longer visits.

Here in Wales, we are developing a distinct policy, Learning Pathways 14-19, which aims to provide real opportunities to all young people in this age group. This will include opportunities for more work-based learning and courses in other institutions when and where appropriate.

The House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee is currently undertaking a review of education outside the classroom in England and Wales. The terms of reference are to examine pupils' access to experiences outside the classroom, including outdoor play, academic fieldwork, work experience, out-of-school activities and using the environment as a tool to enrich the curriculum. Also,

to determine what barriers exist to the expansion and development of out-of-classroom learning.

3. Work Placed Learning – Progress on ELWa’s Review

ELWa published the interim report of its review of Learning in and for the Workplace in August, with consultation ending in mid October. ELWa is currently finalising the outcome of the review before submitting it to me. The main themes in the interim report are:

- Improving delivery mechanisms, including a greater separation of ELWa’s planning and commissioning functions from the actual provision of learning on the ground;
- Greater empowerment to give learners and employers more control of the learning undertaken;
- Reforming workplace learning and skills programmes, such as through more emphasis on basic and other generic skills;
- Responding to the needs of employers, including working with Sector Skills Councils;
- Engaging, motivating and supporting learners, for example through implementing the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales that will reward informal learning and short courses;
- Encouraging learning providers to be more responsive to the needs of employers and learners and to drive-up quality and performance.

The recommendations of the Review will be taken into account when finalising our next Skills and Employment Action Plan. This was issued for consultation in May and the responses, over 100, are currently being considered. The final plan will be debated in Plenary on 11 January.

Taken together, the two documents will provide a comprehensive assessment of learning for the workplace and will introduce some significant improvements to help ensure that our learning programmes meet the needs of employers, employees, the economically inactive and Wales as a whole.

4. School Transport Bill

Following pre-legislative scrutiny, to which the ELL Committee contributed, a School Transport Bill was introduced to Parliament on 14 October 2004. The published Bill and Explanatory Notes are available on the UK Parliament website at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/pabills.htm>.

The second reading of the Bill took place on 28 October and Committee Stage in the House of Commons will be held on 9 and 11 November.

I will keep the Committee informed on the progress of the Bill in future monthly reports.

The published Bill is not substantially different from the draft Bill which the Committee considered as part of consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny earlier this year. The Bill does however contain an additional sub-paragraph in clause 1 which requires scheme authorities to provide monitoring information to the National Assembly for Wales (and, in the case of English authorities, to the Secretary of State). A short standard clause has also been added to cover 'financial provisions' and some drafting changes have been made to two further clauses. Most of the detailed issues raised during consultation can be dealt with by amendments to the accompanying prospectus rather than by changes to the Bill itself.

5. Review of Assessment Arrangements for 11 and 14-year-olds

I promised to keep you informed of progress with this work.

As I reported on 22nd September a consultation paper setting out the new arrangements was issued at the start of term. The consultation period ended on 22nd October. A full report on the consultation exercise is currently being prepared and will be published on the Internet in due course. I am, however, able to provide a summary of the 414 responses received.

There was overwhelming support 80% to remove the Key Stage 2 tests from the statutory arrangements for next year and 67% supported removal of the Key Stage 3 tests in 2006. The option of external marking in Key Stage 2 for 2005 was supported 72% and by 77% for similar arrangements to be in place at Key Stage 3 in 2006.

With such overwhelming support for my proposals the regulations amending the Key Stage 2 requirements for 2005 were laid on 2nd November and were due to be made, using executive procedure, on 9 November. As I explained in my 22nd September report the use of executive procedure was necessary to ensure the correct legislative base was in place before ACCAC could inform schools of the new arrangements. The regulations dealing with the Key Stage 3 arrangements for 2006 will follow in due course and will be made using standard procedure.

6. Assembly Learning Grant

Figures released on 20 October show that the numbers applying for and receiving the Assembly Learning Grant are increasing. The figures for the 2002/03 academic year - the first year proper of the scheme - showed that the number of applications was up by 13 per cent compared with the "pathfinder"

year, and the number of successful applications was up by nine percent.

The largest increase in successful applications was for full time further education students. This is very encouraging, as the Assembly Learning Grants have, for the first time, provided eligible FE students with a guaranteed source of financial support.

7. Devolution of Student Support and Higher Education Act 2004

The Devolution of Student Support project continues to progress well. The independent study group chaired by Professor Teresa Rees, the second "Rees Review", is now well underway.

Providing a bilingual student support system - Task and Finish Group

The Provision of a Bilingual Student Support System Task & Finish Group held its final meeting on 15 September. Members endorsed the final version of the Recommendations Paper. Representatives of the Group presented the recommendations to the October meeting of the Devolution of Student Support Project Board.

The Welsh Language Board has proposed that it undertakes a separate study into the readiness on Welsh LEAs to provide a fully bilingual student support service.

8. Careers Wales Online

On 3 November I launched Careers Wales Online in the Barry Waterfront IT Centre.

Careers Wales Online is a pioneering new virtual service that will revolutionise careers advice and guidance in Wales. It is a flexible, accessible and highly innovative web service that looks set to change the face of careers guidance across Wales; providing access high-quality advice and guidance on careers and learning options in a way that suits them.

Online will facilitate both the development of individual self-management skills and provide access to expert guidance delivered by Careers Wales. In a world where lifelong learning is a requirement for everyone to become and remain employable, this is a unique service that will benefit everyone in Wales.

The development of this new web service has attracted international attention. Serge Ravet, the head of the European Institute for E-Learning, attended the launch and was very positive about the potential for Careers Wales Online to act as a model for other European countries.

Careers Wales Online will help ensure that our all-age careers information, advice and guidance service continues to provide a service that moves with the demands of the people of Wales and our rapidly changing economy.

9. Truancy Information against Targets, including Additional £6m/Benchmarking

On 26th October figures on 'Absenteeism from Secondary Schools in Wales 2003/04' were released. The figures show a slight decrease in the number of (half-day) sessions missed through absence (authorised and unauthorised) from 9.5 per cent in 2002/03 to 9.4 per cent of sessions. This is the third successive improvement in total absences. However in 2003/04, 1.7 per cent of (half-day) sessions were missed through unauthorised absence, a slight increase on the previous year. (1.6%)

There is variation in the recording of absences as authorised or otherwise. Follow-up practices in schools across Wales will also have an impact on this figure, as more active follow-up might establish an absence as not being authorised. This is why we issued guidance in May 2004 to ensure consistency of figure collection.

Our target for 2004, of 92% attendance, as set out in The Learning Country was set to be challenging, however I am disappointed that we have not reached this. Whilst we have achieved a steady improvement in our attendance figures, there is still much to be done.

£6 million funding will be made available over the next 3 years to invest in electronic attendance packages for schools across all parts of Wales. Electronic registration packages have been proven to improve attendance in schools as they provide readily available information on individual pupils' attendance at an earlier stage than manual registers which allow schools to react more quickly and chase up non-attendees with the LEAs' education welfare service. Basic electronic packages, recording information twice daily, are available in most secondary schools but a far more effective approach is to monitor attendance lesson by lesson to spot patterns of pupils disaffection on certain subjects and to avoid pupils leaving school as soon as they have registered.

The funding will be used to purchase such packages or for the development of existing packages. Funding could also be provided to purchase packages for primary schools who are still using manual registers, which would produce savings to schools in terms of avoiding manual intervention as well as tying-in with the Assembly's policies on earlier intervention.

I will also be introducing a system of benchmarking attendance levels throughout all schools in Wales over the next few months. This will use a model based on the entitlement to Free School Meal indicator, and will allow schools to look at their attendance levels and compare them to similar schools. For those schools who are below the level that the model suggests they could be achieving, they will need to advise us on the reasons for this and how they plan to improve their attendance. We will be asking for plans from schools at varying levels of detail dependent on how they compare with the benchmarked levels of attendance.

10. Higher Education Welsh Medium Launch

I am pleased to report that on Tuesday 2 November, I gave approval to HEFCW to utilise Reaching

Higher Funding to support an innovative and collaborative scheme to extend Welsh medium provision in the higher education sector in Wales. The scheme is designed to increase teaching capacity in the short to medium term and forms an integral part of the strategy chaired by Andrew Green. The bid essentially consists of two components - a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship scheme and a Postgraduate Research Scholarship scheme. The Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship element of the bid builds on the existing successful programme and will provide for up to six Fellows per year to 2007/08 at an estimated cost of almost £250,000. The Research Scholarship scheme proposes to fund up to 10 scholarships per year for an initial three-year period and will be tenable for a maximum period of five years, depending on the duration of the research degree being undertaken. The scheme will extend over seven years, commencing in 2005-06 at an estimated cost of over £2.6 million. Funding has been approved to 2007-08. The bid has been approved in advance of the strategy so that structures can be put in place to allow the schemes to start in 2005/06.

I expect to be able to make further announcements with regard to the broader strategy for strengthening Welsh medium provision over coming months.