

ELL(2) 08-04 (p.3)

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

Date: 19 May 2004

Title: Budget Planning Round 2004: Education and Lifelong Learning

PURPOSE

1. To provide the Committee with the opportunity to consider budget priorities within the Education and Lifelong Learning portfolio in accordance with Standing Orders 9.8, 21.1 and 21.2.

TIMING

2. Assembly Committees are asked to respond by 4 June.

BACKGROUND

3. The Finance Minister wrote to Chairs of Subject Committees on 30 March 2004 outlining the Assembly's planning and budgeting process for 2005-06 onwards in accordance with Standing Order 21.1. The Budget Planning round will allocate firm budgets for 2005-06, and indicative budgets for the subsequent 2 years. A copy of the letter is provided at Annex 1 and the Committee is asked to consider :
 - how the priorities set out in "Wales: A Better Country" can be achieved most effectively; and
 - whether budgets should be adjusted in the light of changing circumstances and commitments.
4. The budget for 2005-06 is the first year of the Spending Review currently being conducted by the Assembly and the first year of the UK Government's spending review (SR2004). Our total budget for 2005-06 will not be known until SR2004 reports towards the end of July although we anticipate it will remain largely unchanged. The Assembly has already

agreed indicative budgets for 2005-06, which were set out in the

Supplementary Budget on 24 March, and the ELL element is set out at Annex 2. It is important to note that a substantial element of funding for compulsory schooling is included within the local government revenue settlement and that the ongoing pay and price pressures will be a feature of the budget planning considerations for the Local Government MEG. The budgetary provision made by local authorities for education services for 2004-05 will be notified to the Committee in due course.

DISCUSSION

1. Our goal is to establish a sustainable future for Wales. This means establishing a competitive advantage for Wales based on a clear identity and real strengths. It means helping those communities that have been on the receiving end of the negative impacts of economic and social change in the twentieth century, and addressing our remaining big challenges – the need to help more people into work; to create better jobs and skills; to improve health, and to build strong and safe communities.
2. Our vision is therefore for a sustainable future for Wales where action for social, economic and environmental improvement work together to create positive change. This involves:
 - promoting a diverse, competitive, high-added value economy that minimises demands on the environment, together with high quality skills and education;
 - action on social justice that tackles poverty and poor health, and provides people and their communities with the means to help themselves and break out of the poverty trap;
 - action in our built and natural environment that enhances pride in the community, supports biodiversity, promotes local employment and helps to minimize waste generation, energy and transport demands;
 - strengthening Wales' cultural identity and helping to create a bilingual country;
 - ensuring all our children and future generations enjoy better prospects in life, and are not landed with a legacy of problems bequeathed by us;
 - supporting people to live healthy and independent lives;
 - promoting openness, partnership, participation and learning.
1. In taking forward our vision in this second Assembly term, there are four key areas which we will focus on as we continue to develop policy;

- helping more people into jobs;
- improving health;
- developing strong and safe communities and
- creating better jobs and skills;

1. None of these areas is the responsibility of a single department or agency and each will need to be a priority for all the areas of government that have a role to play. These are not issues that have simple, ready answers and they are the subjects of current policy debate both in government, among our partners and in academia. We want to draw on all this experience and thinking to move the agenda forward.

2. Our priorities for Education and Lifelong Learning have not changed – they are to:-

- secure high standards and expectations in all settings
- put the interests of the learner first in all sectors of education and lifelong learning
- overcome barriers to learning so that we widen access and participation; and
- ensure that education and lifelong learning provides for the economic, civic and cultural growth of Wales.

1. The key directions are set out in The Learning Country and the documents which followed The Learning Country; Reaching Higher, Foundation Phase 3, Learning Pathways 14-19 and the Skills and Employment Action Plan. The evidence continues to show we are making real progress to deliver on our agenda – working in close partnership with the many stakeholders also committed to putting the interests of the learner first.

Achievements and Priorities for the Future

- Our policies for Better Early Years Provision will ensure at least half time early years places for all three year olds whose parents want them by September 2004. Primary School Free Breakfasts will be piloted in Community First areas from September. Subject to successful outcomes of our pilot projects we will also be introducing a Foundation Phase for 3-7 year olds.
- High quality teaching, with support and training delivered by well-informed providers is essential. We are committed to Better Practitioner Development, supporting early professional development, continuing professional development, head teacher leadership programmes and the implementation of the Teacher's Workload Agreement.
- Investment for Better Schools involves a significant increase in funding for school buildings to £139m per annum. This is committed for 05-06, and investment in community focussed schools is also in place. Having reduced infant class sizes to a maximum of 30 (with permitted exceptions), we are moving on to tackle junior class sizes as well.
- We continue to strive for Better Standards, promoting high expectations and progressively improving attainment through a rich curriculum underpinned by effective regulation, assessment

and inspection. Pupil achievement at KS2 and GCSE level reached record levels in 2003. For example, 71% of pupils achieved level 4 or higher in the combination of core subject tests of English, Welsh, Maths and Science 3 percentage points higher than 2002 and 51% of pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs grades A*-C or vocational equivalent, 1 percentage point higher than in 2002 and 5 percentage points higher than in 1998. The Estyn Chief Inspector's annual report for 2002-03 (latest report) confirms that the standard of teaching and training has risen in all areas of education and learning. Primary, secondary and special schools have exceeded our targets for the number of good lessons and there are fewer unsatisfactory lessons. I look forward to receiving Professor Daugherty's final report on the future of assessment at the end of KS2 and 3. The Welsh Baccalaureate pilots are currently running in 18 schools and colleges with more coming on board in September.

- I acknowledge the work being undertaken by this Committee in its review of Better Support for Learners with Additional Needs. I will continue to work with key stakeholders to deliver more adaptable, inclusive and relevant provision for learners with additional needs and for disadvantaged groups.
- I am committed to a Better Higher Level Learning by developing opportunities in and widening access to higher education through our Reaching Higher Strategy. This has already resulted in the creation of 4 Reaching Wider Partnerships across Wales delivering many innovative and exciting projects, e.g. student mentoring and family and inter-generational learning. There has also been substantial progress in terms of reconfiguration of the sector – notably the merger between the University of Wales College of Medicine and the University of Wales, Cardiff and subject rationalisation in Law, Education and Nursing at the University of Wales Swansea and Swansea Institute. Reconfiguration is the means by which the higher education sector in Wales will be more competitive.
- We have done much to reduce financial barriers to learning to ensure Better Access, introducing learning grants for further and higher education students – the only part of the UK to do so. This Autumn will see the introduction of Education Maintenance Allowances for 16 – 18 year olds. The devolution of student support and the tuition fee regime will put us on the same constitutional footing as Scotland and N Ireland and will allow us to take a whole system view of the sector.
- Providing Better Options and Opportunities for young people means greater collaborative work between schools, colleges and other providers. Our 'Learning Pathways for 14-19' and our 'Extending Entitlement' policies are already bearing fruit in terms of the development of partnership and network based working arrangements to take forward delivery plans and provide real opportunity and choice for young people. The development of local Young People's Partnerships and 14-19 Networks has allowed real progress to be made in designing and changing local service provision while creating opportunities which respond to the locally expressed needs of young people.
- We are tackling the problems of low skills in adults and promoting the development of higher level skills to support a strong sustainable economy. The Skills and Employment Action Plan will help to direct us towards Better Skills for Employment in Wales. ELWa is proactively engaging with other agencies in raising economic activity levels and ensuring that programmes and

provision are responsive to the needs of those who are economically inactive. As part of this work it is undertaking reviews of both Adult and Community Learning and Learning in the Workplace. ELWa will be funding, from this year, the second phase of the FE pay initiative, which will honour our commitment to achieve pay parity between FE lecturers and school teachers. In addition, Unions and fforwm will undertake further work this year on management and responsibility allowances in colleges. Consolidation of pay parity will be factored into our assessment of resource pressures for future years.

- Running through all these plans is the commitment to supporting the development of Welsh Medium Education as set out in our first strategic plan for a bilingual Wales. – Iaith Pawb. Plans for 2004-05 include the completion of a new Welsh-medium integrated centre in Aberystwyth, commencing our major training programme for Welsh-medium Early Years practitioners – training at least 150 practitioners by 2006, increasing funding to ACCAC to boost Welsh-medium classroom resources and Welsh-medium qualifications and beginning Key Stage 2 Welsh Immersion pilots.
1. There has been a broad consensus in the ELL Committee in favour of our educational priorities over previous Budget Planning Rounds. Last year the Committee highlighted its support for the Reaching Higher Strategy, the devolution of responsibility for student support and the funding provided to address disparity in pay and conditions between further education lecturers and teachers in school sixth forms. It also considered that particular attention should be given to special educational needs, raising standards in schools, tackling teacher's workload and implementing Iaith Pawb.

Recommendations

2. That the Committee informs the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services of its views on priorities. At this stage of the Budget Planning Round, the Committee is invited to give its views on broad priorities and the overall pattern of investment; the Committee will be asked for its views on detailed budgets after the summer recess at the draft budget stage.

Financial Implications

13. As this paper is merely part of the overall Assembly budget process, there are no additional financial implications for the Assembly.