

# Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

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## All-Wales Educational Networks

### A contribution by XLWales to the “School of the Future” policy review by the National Assembly for Wales

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The purpose of this document is to make a contribution to the Policy Review of the National Assembly for Wales entitled “School of the Future”. We are very grateful to the National Assembly for Wales for the opportunity to contribute to this Policy Review.

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#### 1. *Scope of Policy Review*

The following is extracted from the letter dated August 2002 sent to consultees by the National Assembly:

*In the autumn term, the Committee will start a policy review examining the school of the future. The policy review will identify possible changes in the roles and operation of primary and secondary schools 10 to 15 years hence. The review will recommend policy developments necessary to take account of these anticipated changes, building on the strategy set out in “The Learning Country”.*

*The policy review will focus on the following issues:*

- q *The school as a community resource;*
- q *Use of, and developments in, information technology;*
- q *Teaching methods;*
- q *Curriculum;*

- q *Funding;*
- q *Widening opportunity and participation; and*
- q *Adding value to the education and school experience.*

*The policy review will take account of the National Assembly's three main themes:*

- q *Sustainable development;*
- q *Equal opportunities; and*
- q *Social inclusion.*

The Committee invites you to contribute to the review by submitting your thoughts on the areas listed above. The Committee is particularly keen to encourage 'blue skies' thinking. All contributions received will be summarised and put before the Committee during the autumn term. The Committee intends to complete the policy review by Easter 2003 and will publish a full report of its consideration and recommendations.

## **2. Summary of our proposals**

XLWales has extensive experience of the needs and operation of primary schools across the whole of South and West Wales, but little knowledge of the secondary school sector. Our proposals therefore relate specifically to the primary sector at this stage, although we believe that our proposals could also usefully be extended to Key Stage 3 (12-14 year olds).

Our proposals may be summarised as follows:

1. We believe that the most effective way to develop primary schools beyond their already excellent levels of achievement in Wales is to develop a number of carefully-selected All-Wales Educational Networks that will add significant value to the school experience across the whole of Wales.
2. A key requirement of any such Networks is that they must complement, rather than compete with, the role and work of the 22 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in Wales.
3. We recommend that the All-Wales Educational Networks are operated by voluntary sector organisations, such as educational charities, industry associations and trade unions, rather than by the public sector.
4. The networks should be funded by a National Assembly "Educational Excellence" grant scheme, administered by the Community Fund or New Opportunities Fund, from 1/4/04.
5. The grants should be provided on a three-year rolling basis, to enable successful local or regional educational networks to expand into All-Wales Networks, and then to fund them year upon year.
6. Grant applications that will help to reduce the most severe skills shortages defined in *Future Skills Wales* should be particularly welcomed.
7. There are two All-Wales Educational Networks that could we believe make a major difference to the levels of educational achievement in Wales:
  - a) An All-Wales Network of "Roving Teachers", visiting Primary Schools and Community Groups across Wales.
  - b) An All-Wales Network of "Family Technium Centres", based in town centres across Wales.

## **3. "Educational Excellence" grant scheme**

The first step in implementing our proposals would be for the National Assembly to launch an "Educational

Excellence” grant scheme. The aim of the grant scheme would be to raise the levels of educational achievement amongst children of primary school age across Wales, via a series of All-Wales Educational Networks.

There are more than 1600 primary schools in Wales, ranging from very small schools (less than 20 pupils) in rural areas, to large schools (400+ pupils) in urban areas. Almost all of the schools are funded by the 22 LEAs in Wales, and the vast majority come under direct LEA control.

From our own experience of working with many hundreds of primary schools across 15 of the 22 LEAs, we can confirm that educational standards in primary schools in Wales are already extraordinarily high. The support given by LEAs to the schools is also excellent, particularly when one considers that LEAs have to delegate all but a small proportion of their annual education budget directly to schools. The policies of the National Assembly for Wales have also had a major positive effect on primary schools in recent years, not only by providing large amounts of extra funding to LEAs, but also by removing some of the former barriers to excellence, such as the Key Stage 1 SATS tests.

Given the existing level of excellence in the primary school sector in Wales, we have found it difficult in this Policy Review to think of any major changes or new initiatives that could be funded and delivered through the traditional Assembly >> LEA >> School funding route that would result in even more vibrant and successful “Primary Schools of the Future” in Wales.

Nevertheless, we would argue that the National Assembly is currently missing out on a major opportunity to achieve even greater “educational added value”, by only considering primary school initiatives that can be funded and delivered via the Assembly >> LEA >> School route.

One major reason why we believe that alternative routes for funding need to be considered is that the relatively small size of most LEAs means that they cannot achieve the economies of scale that can be gained at an All-Wales level. Funding the implementation of National Assembly policy at both a local level and a national level works well in other major policy areas, such as economic development and (increasingly) post-16 education. We believe it would also work well for primary education.

It is proposed that the “Educational Excellence” grant scheme operates as follows:

- Ø Grants would be for a three year period, renewable annually.
- Ø Grant applications could only be made by voluntary sector organisations, such as educational charities, industry associations and trade unions. This will maximise the potential for innovative and cost-effective projects, delivered by organisations that have special skills and knowledge (eg of the construction industry).
- Ø Grant applications that will help to reduce the most severe skills shortages defined in Future Skills Wales should be particularly welcomed (eg communication skills, team-working skills, innovation skills).
- Ø Grants would only be awarded either
  - a) to expand existing educational networks that already serve at least two counties into All-Wales Educational Networks, or
  - b) to provide year-upon-year funding for established All-Wales Educational Networks.
- Ø New grant applicants would have to demonstrate that their Educational Network would complement, rather than compete with, the work of LEAs.
- Ø New grant applicants would have to include evidence from primary schools of the educational

added-value that their existing local network is providing.

- Ø Appropriate cross-cutting themes should be built into the grant scheme, such as Bi-lingual delivery, Equal opportunities, and Social inclusion.
- Ø Grant applications would have to include annual targets, with progress towards those targets being monitored monthly.
- Ø Administration of the grant scheme would have to be delegated by the Assembly to an organisation with significant experience of grant administration.

In developing such a grant scheme, the Assembly could draw upon the wealth of experience of funding bodies such as the Community Fund, New Opportunities Fund, Education Extra, the WDA, ELWa and the Wales European Funding Office.

However, we believe that there is no All-Wales public sector body in Wales that has both the necessary remit, and the grant administrative experience, to administer the new “Educational Excellence” grant. Instead, we propose that the National Assembly ask the Community Fund or New Opportunities Fund to administer the grant scheme, via an Assembly contract. Both Funds already have considerable experience of funding and monitoring large voluntary sector grants in Wales.

#### **4. Examples of All-Wales Educational Networks**

There are significant numbers of existing local or regional initiatives for primary schools that might possibly be expanded into effective All-Wales Educational Networks with the help of an “Educational Excellence” grant. There are also some existing UK-wide schemes that could be made more effective in Wales via such a grant, and also good All-Wales initiatives that have been planned, but which remain on the drawing board due to the lack of an All-Wales funding mechanism at present.

Some of the possible All-Wales Educational Networks are listed below, by way of example. We are sure that readers of this document will be able to suggest additions to this list from their own experience.

- A network of Summer Holiday Camps across Wales, that primary school children could attend for a week. Each Camp would deliver a carefully-planned week-long educational programme, designed to extend the curriculum at KS1 and KS2. A percentage of the places in each Camp could be reserved specifically for children with special needs.
- Greater support in Wales for UK organisations that support the creation and development of Out-of-school Clubs in primary schools (such as Education Extra, Young Engineers and The British Association for the Advancement of Science).
- A programme of practical support for After-school Clubs in deprived areas across Wales, which have particular problems in continuing from year to year, even with financial help from their LEA.
- An All-Wales programme that gives work experience with children to student-teachers, both after-school and during the holidays. Such a programme would complement the teaching practice provided by teacher training institutions, and would also provide extra resources to after-school clubs and playschemes.
- Proposals to help existing initiatives for primary schools that cover most or all of Wales to become fully bi-lingual.
- National competitions for primary schools, designed to assist teachers in specific curriculum areas, and to celebrate excellence.

- Proposals to make even better use of existing All-Wales volunteering schemes such as Neighbourhood Engineers and Millennium Volunteers.
- All-Wales educational networks that seek to deliver the National Assembly's strategy on the Environment and Sustainability.
- All-Wales initiatives related to the safety of children (eg stranger-danger, road safety).
- National programmes to help primary school teachers to deliver "Personal and Social Education" (PSE), which will be included in the National Curriculum from 1 September 2003.
- All-Wales programmes that help children to develop greater knowledge of business and entrepreneurship (such as Young Enterprise).
- All-Wales initiatives to bring more parents into primary schools, not only as classroom assistants during the school day, but also to attend family learning sessions out of school hours.
- An All-Wales programme to help primary schools combat the problems of truancy.
- Initiatives that help to encourage local businesses to develop partnerships with primary schools.
- Programmes that aim to specifically help smaller schools in the rural areas of Wales to maximise the educational achievements of their pupils.
- An All-Wales initiative to provide training and hot-line support to volunteers working in primary schools.
- A network of "Roving Teachers" across Wales (see section 5).
- A network of "Family Technium Centres" across Wales (see section 6).

We have deliberately selected examples above of All-Wales Educational Networks that relate to people and organisations, rather than to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). We do have a concern that "more ICT in primary schools" is too often viewed in the UK as being synonymous with "better education in primary schools". Greater use of ICT will certainly provide benefits to schools, and ICT will undoubtedly have a part to play in all the above initiatives, but at the end of the day ICT is only an enabling technology.

We appreciate that some of the above examples are already in receipt of funding from the Assembly, channelled through a variety of funding routes. It may well be that the introduction of an All-Wales Educational Excellence grant would be an opportunity to rationalise the funding of existing primary school initiatives at a regional or All-Wales level.

Sections 5 and 6 now go on to provide case studies on two of the above examples – "Roving Teachers" and "Family Technium Centres".

## ***5. Case study 1 - All-Wales network of Roving Teachers***

For more than a century, primary schools in Wales have benefited greatly from visits to their school by adults with a wide range of different skills and experiences to offer.

As recently as 20 years ago, LEAs were able to offer large numbers of advisory teachers, peripatetic teachers, and other LEA-employed staff, who gave considerable assistance to schools in their delivery of

the curriculum. However, the move to 22 unitary authorities, and changes to the way that schools and LEAs are funded, have meant that the numbers of LEA-employed staff performing this role have been reduced considerably.

Primary schools do continue to make good use of adult volunteers, but whilst such volunteers will always have a very valuable role to play, most schools have only a small base of local volunteers, who may well not have the skills necessary to enrich the curriculum in the areas most needed by the school. There are some national volunteering schemes that benefit primary schools, such as Neighbourhood Engineers, but there are very real difficulties in such schemes in recruiting, vetting, training, administering and supervising a large pool of volunteers to a uniformly high standard.

A third option for schools is to buy in outside help on a commercial basis, such as that available from theatre companies. However, commercial rates are such that this is a facility that schools can rarely afford.

The end result is that primary schools may find it difficult to bring in the extra expertise that they need to deliver all parts of the curriculum effectively, or to bring in adults with special skills that can significantly extend the curriculum for their pupils. This is a particular problem for smaller schools, and for schools in deprived areas.

We propose that this problem should be overcome by encouraging voluntary sector organisations to set up National Networks of “Roving Teachers”. Each network would specialise in a particular skills area, according to the remit and expertise of the volunteer sector organisation running the network.

One existing model that could be adopted for these networks is the XLWales Invention & Discovery Roadshow, which operates as follows:

1. The Roadshow currently visits primary schools in all 15 counties of South Wales and West Wales.
2. Roadshow visits always last for a whole day, and usually comprise sessions with three different classes during the day.
3. The visits are provided by six “Roadshow Managers”, working from home in different parts of South and West Wales.
4. Two of the Roadshow Managers are fluent in Welsh, allowing the increasing demand for Welsh medium visits to be met.
5. New Roadshow Managers are recruited as qualified primary school teachers. They then complete an extensive induction programme, to enable them to deliver a menu of 20 different Invention & Discovery Challenges to schools.
6. The challenges are primarily designed to help pupils to develop “Enterprise and Innovation skills”. However, each challenge is also firmly rooted in the Science or Design & Technology Curriculum. In our view, close links to the National Curriculum are essential, whatever the subject matter.
7. Class teachers must always remain with their class during Roadshow sessions. Not only does this ensure that the class teacher remains responsible for discipline, but also that the class teachers themselves gain new skills and confidence by participating in each session.

There are major benefits to delivering programmes of school visits by Roving Teachers on an All-Wales basis, rather than just a local basis. These include:

1. A team of Roving Teachers delivering the same menu of projects to hundreds of primary schools each year can develop best educational practice.
2. The cost of project development and equipment can be spread across large numbers of visits.
3. Centralised administration can be provided, at a low unit cost per visit.

4. The whole of Wales can benefit from a uniformly high standard of delivery.

As an indicator, for the last six years XLWales has been delivering whole-day school visits at a cost of only £300 per day. £98 of this is paid by the school, £52 is paid from sponsorship, and £150 from ELWa. In our view, it is important that schools contribute towards the cost, if they are to value the provision.

We believe there is the potential for a number of organisations to set up National Networks of Roving Teachers, who would be specially trained to deliver a menu of projects specifically related to that organisation's remit. For instance, the Construction Industry Training Board might wish to provide a national programme of construction-related projects for primary schools.

There is also huge potential to extend the programme of visits by Roving Teachers to Out of School settings, such as after-school clubs, cubs, brownies, family groups, special needs groups, playschemes, and family events. Children and families in these settings often have a thirst for knowledge and for exciting educational experiences that is currently unfulfilled. Regular visits by Roving Teachers would also assist the long-term viability of such clubs and events.

## **6. Case study 2 - All-Wales network of "Family Technium centres"**

*Technium® is a registered trade mark of the WDA.*

The Technium® Centre initiative is very good example of the concept of taking a successful local initiative, and expanding it Wales-wide. Technium Centres provide "incubator units" for new and expanding companies, plus a wide range of support services to help those companies to become successful and grow. The first centre was opened in Swansea docks as recently as the year 2000, but thanks to the drive of the National Assembly, WDA and other partners, a network of centres is already being built across Wales.

There is a major constraint, though, that will prevent the new network of Technium Centres developing large numbers of new and expanding companies in the decades ahead. That is that currently the supply of would-be entrepreneurs in Wales is much too low to achieve the high company start-up rates that are required, if the Technium Centres are to make a major contribution to raising the GDP of Wales. A number of initiatives are already seeking to tackle this problem, not only by seeking to persuade people that an entrepreneurial career has many attractions, but also by helping young people and adults to develop the skills base needed by entrepreneurs.

However, most of the existing skills and careers initiatives in this area are delivered to young people post-14, in schools, colleges and universities, and to adults, via colleges, universities and adult education. Whilst such an approach does undoubtedly achieve a reasonable level of success, we believe that a significantly higher success rate could be achieved by ensuring that all 11-year old children leave primary school with a good level of "Enterprise and Innovation skills". According to the Wales Regional Technology Plan (1996), Future Skills Wales (1999) and the Entrepreneurship Action Plan (2000), such skills should include:

- **Communication skills**
- **Ability to learn**
- **Team-working skills**
- **Showing initiative / Innovation skills**
- **Problem-solving skills**

## ● Organising own learning & development

These Enterprise and Innovation skills do already fall within the primary school National Curriculum, but much greater emphasis on this skills set is required at primary level if Wales is to really develop an entrepreneurial culture. There are some opportunities to develop Enterprise and Innovation skills more effectively during the school day, as outlined in section 5, but in our view the real potential lies in out of school settings such as **Family Learning**.

We therefore propose that a network of “Family Technium Centres” is launched across Wales. The primary purpose of such centres would be to allow children of primary school age and their parents/ grandparents to develop Enterprise and Innovation skills in a Family Learning setting.

We have already gained considerable experience of helping families to develop Enterprise and Innovation skills, in our XLWales Family Technology Centre in Swansea. In our experience, Family Learning works very well for this “skills set”, because:

- Ø A Family Learning setting can be provided that is exciting and enjoyable for adults and children alike, unlike (to many people) formal education.
- Ø Family activities are popular with families from many different backgrounds, allowing a high level of social inclusion to be achieved.
- Ø The children learn new skills from their parents and grandparents, and the parents and grandparents learn new skills from their children.
- Ø Family Learning encourages families to continue doing projects together when they return home.
- Ø Children and adults with special needs can be supported by other family members or carers.
- Ø Parents develop a greater respect for their child’s skills and knowledge, which makes them more likely to help their child to choose appropriate subject options at GCSE and beyond.
- Ø Parents and grandparents gain confidence and skills that can be of immediate benefit to them in their jobs, their search for work, or their plans to become an entrepreneur.
- Ø The children gain confidence and skills that will be of great assistance to them when they move into the workplace, whether or not they decide become an entrepreneur.

It is proposed that “Family Technium Centres” are opened in South West Wales, West Wales, the South East Wales valleys, Mid Wales, North East Wales, and North West Wales. This would ensure that every family in Wales is at most an hour away from a centre. The centres should be based in the shopping centre of a large town in each region, so as to ensure good access by public transport, and to encourage families to drop in when they are on a family trip into town. The centres might be based on the model of the XLWales Family Technology Centre, but we would propose that each centre houses a number of different family learning organisations, not just XLWales.

The operating costs of the “Family Technium Centres” would be met via an Educational Excellence grant. The capital costs of each centre might be met by grants from the WDA and ERDF, plus the Heritage Lottery Fund if any centres can be located in listed buildings.

## ***7. In conclusion***

We hope that the examples in section 4 and the case studies in sections 5 and 6 give a flavour of how All-Wales Educational Networks funded via Educational Excellence grants could add a whole new “National dimension” to the education of children aged 3 to 11, and their families.

We would very much welcome extra ideas for All-Wales Educational Networks, and suggestions as to how



the grant scheme could also help to add value to Key Stage 3 education (age 12-14).

We do, though, have a concern over the proposed timescales for the implementation of the conclusions arising out of the "School of the Future" Policy Review.

The proposed Educational Excellence grants could indeed make a significant impact to educational standards in the 10-15 year time horizon envisaged in the Policy Review. However, there is also a significant need for such a grant scheme to be launched in the short to medium term, if successful existing regional educational networks for primary schools are not be closed down. This situation has arisen because the former TECs funded numerous excellent primary school initiatives. ELWa then took over this funding in April 2001, under their Education/Business Links budget. ELWa are now, though, carrying out a review of this budget, which we understand may lead to ELWa ceasing to fund a number of primary-age projects on 31 August 2003.

We believe that the proposed Educational Excellence grant scheme, administered by the Community Fund or New Opportunities Fund, would be ideally placed to take over and then expand many of these regional educational networks for primary school age children. However, it is unlikely that such a grant scheme could be set up, and the initial applications processed, by 1 September 2003.

We therefore propose that ELWa should commit to continue funding the former TEC primary school projects for a further 7 months. This would allow time for the handover of funding to be properly planned, the grant scheme to be set up, and the first of the new grant-funded projects to start on 1 April 2004.

### ***For further information...***

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