

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 27 FEBRUARY 2003.

Amongst other things, this report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 23 January 2003. **Annex A** sets out my major engagements since the last report.

1. SCIENCE YEAR

Wales Science Year has now come to a close. On Tuesday 10 December I attended the "Review of Wales Science Year" at Techniquest, Cardiff to celebrate the success of the project and to present certificates to outstanding participants. Wales Science Year has provided grants for a variety of science-based projects including the development of the Wales Science Year website, grant funding for secondary school scientific projects and activities, and the distribution of science CD-ROMs to schools. Assembly funding has also provided Intel digital microscopes for every secondary school in Wales (including SEN) and digital whiteboards for use in secondary school science departments (as part of the broadband / whiteboard) initiative.

The broad aims of Science Year were:

- to raise the profile of science and its impact on society;
- to generate excitement about, and to stimulate creativity and innovation in, science-based teaching and learning;
- to make science accessible and appealing to all young people; and
- to raise awareness of the career opportunities in science.

An independent evaluation has shown that Wales Science Year has been very effective in meeting several of these key objectives- increasing participation of young people in science activities; generating creative approaches to science education; extending opportunities for science outreach projects; and providing ICT equipment to schools.

2. ARRANGEMENTS FOR WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales, the first Special Educational Needs Code for Wales, issued in 2002 has clearly stated our intention to make special educational needs provision available through the medium of English or Welsh.

I am aware that there are significant difficulties being experienced by local education authorities when they try to establish or maintain the full range of services for children with special educational needs.

In order to have a clear understanding of the shortfall in Welsh language provision and services I commissioned, in conjunction with the Welsh

Language Board, a report into the availability of Welsh medium and bilingual provision and services for pupils with special educational needs in Wales. The report's conclusions suggest the need for holistic and integrated planning for SEN Welsh medium and bilingual provision.

The report was discussed at the Welsh Advisory Group for SEN and it was their view that a determined effort should be made to develop the provision and make available the services at the earliest opportunities.

I have already established a National Steering Group for SEN and I have asked them to carry out all Wales reviews of specialist SEN services.

They are currently reviewing the provision for children with hearing difficulties, visual difficulties, speech and language difficulties and children on the autistic spectrum. I fully anticipate that in each of the reports there will be a clear statement that reinforces our commitment to making provision available in the language of choice.

We do, however, have to take into account the incidence of need and the demand of service. It may be necessary that some SEN services will need to be provided on a regional basis rather than at a local authority level.

In order to make this a realistic option I ensured that Wales's specific clauses were included in the Education Act 2002. These clauses provide the necessary primary legislation to allow me to bring forward proposals for regional services or provision if I deem it appropriate.

I have also made a commitment to provide regional capital funds under the capital investment in school buildings. I have done this in order that individual LEA's can establish regional centres if that is deemed necessary.

In North Wales, I have made available £2 million for the redevelopment of Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn into a regional centre for autistic children. This special school will provide specialist provision both through the medium of Welsh and English.

I would hope that LEA's will look to bring forward proposals for enhancing and improving the availability of Welsh medium provision and services for children with special educational needs.

3. INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING COURSES

STUDENTS LEAVING PGCE COURSES BEFORE COMPLETION

1. Following discussion on 23 January on PGCE student numbers which included data on an England and Wales basis, I said that I would provide further details on the position for Wales.
2. The England and Wales data cited on 23 January was included in a draft of the three page high level summary report of the desk based research study

of existing secondary data sources commissioned by the General Teaching Council for Wales from Cardiff University School of Social Sciences. This included the following:-

“while data is not available for Wales only, information for England and Wales as a whole indicates that many trainees do not complete their course or where they do complete their course, do not subsequently pursue a career in teaching. In 1999/2000, 17% of PGCE students did not complete their course of study, while 29% of all PGCE completers did not take subsequent teaching posts.”

3. I said that I would provide details of those not completing PGCE courses in Wales. Data on those leaving PGCE courses in Wales is not published routinely in this form, but can be obtained from data held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This shows that 7.2% of PGCE students in Wales left the course before it ended; data for the last three years shows the following:-

PGCE students in Wales	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01
	%	%	%
Awarded Qualified Teacher Status	87.2	88.6	89.3
Are yet to complete the course	3.5	1.6	2.1
Left the course before the end	7.9	9.0	7.2
Failed the course	1.4	0.7	1.4

Headcount of all enrolments active at any point in the year.

4. TEACHERS' PAY

1. The School Teachers' Review Body Report 2003 was published by the Department for Education and Skills on 7 February. The report recommends an increase of 2.9% for all teachers' pay scales and allowances. The recommendations are being accepted by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in full and without staging, subject to the statutory consultation exercise

2. Many of the issues remitted to the Review Body by the Department for Education and Skills, such as local approaches to pay; performance-based progression on the main scale, and a multi-year pay award have been noted by the Review Body as longer term issues requiring more work. The Review Body aims to report on these issues in January 2004.

3. Teachers' pay and conditions of service is not a devolved issue. The National Assembly has no powers in its own right to set pay for teachers.

4. Funding for teachers' pay costs in Wales is provided through the local government revenue settlement and allocations to local authorities by the National Council – ELWa. The local government revenue settlement for 2003-04 approved by the Assembly on 29 January allows an increase in unhypothecated revenue support of 9.2% for all local government services. ELWa has increased its overall cash allocation in respect of post-16 learning in schools for 2003-04 by 7.5% compared

with 2002-03. The revenue settlement and the ELWa allocation have taken account of assumed movements in teachers' pay.

5. When the pressures on schools budgets were discussed last autumn by Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) officers and Assembly Government officials, there was agreement that an assumption of a 4% general increase in teachers' pay should be used in assessing pressures. The Assembly Government and the WLGA subsequently agreed that the local government revenue settlement for 2003-04 properly takes into account pay and price pressures on local authority services, including teachers' pay increases.

6. Given the recommendation and proposed acceptance of a 2.9% increase, pressures on the teachers' pay bill should be rather less than the £36m assumed figure used last autumn. This means that local authorities have some headroom within the funding they receive through the local government revenue settlement and from ELWa. This should help them to address other pressures on their services, including pressures arising from the Teachers' Workload agreement.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills is consulting formally on taking forward these recommendations. Responses to this consultation letter have been requested by 7 March. A copy of the consultation letter, which contains details of the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendations, is attached at Annex B. Copies of the full report will be distributed to members as soon as possible; in the meantime the report can be accessed on DfES's Teachernet website at:-

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Management/pay_and_performance/pay/strb2003

5. CAREERS WALES ANNUAL REPORT

This month I am publishing the annual report on the performance of Careers Wales for 2001-02 its first year of operation. Careers Wales is our Made-in-Wales flagship to deliver lifelong advisory support to people at all stages in their learning and working lives.

The report details the progress made in meeting the key objectives that I set at the launch of Careers Wales - in particular, to reach out to socially-excluded groups, engage and extend links with employers and to explore innovative ways of developing the service. Overall, the report summarises that good progress has been made at a time of major expansion in the services being delivered by the seven Careers Wales companies. Of particular significance is the evidence provided by Estyn, who carried out two full Careers Wales company inspections during this difficult transition year. The inspection reports stated that support to clients continued to be delivered to a high standard by well-led and managed companies - this is testament to the commitment and professionalism of all those involved.

Since this period, further challenges have been set for Careers Wales in "The Learning Country" and in my December report I outlined to this Committee a range of the developments that outline the impact that Careers Wales is making locally and nationally. I look forward to Careers Wales continuing to

make a significant contribution to the over-arching aims, policies and values of the Assembly's agenda.

Printed versions of the report will be placed in the National Assembly for Wales's library and an electronic version should now be available on the Assembly's web site. For future years I have agreed that the Careers Wales Association will produce a pan-Wales report in place of the Assembly's report. This change of approach is in recognition of the evolving status of Careers Wales as a strategic all-Wales body promoting a distinct identity and range of services to national quality standards.

6. ESTYN REMIT FOR 2003-04

On 30 January 2003, I issued the Welsh Assembly Government's remit for Estyn for the financial year 2003-04.

In addition to the Chief Inspector's statutory duties, Welsh Assembly Government commissions Estyn each year to carry out additional work set out in an annual remit. The remit complements Estyn's statutory functions and provides a framework for the advice required by the Assembly during the financial year on all aspects of education and training in Wales.

A copy of the remit has been circulated to committee members as a paper to note.

7. THE ATTENDANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP - ACTION PLAN

The Attendance Task and Finish Group's report was presented to the Committee in the Minister's Report on October 24th, 2002. The action plan for taking forward the recommendations has now been agreed with the Group and is attached at Annex C. Work has already begun on implementing the recommendations with the short-term recommendations due to be completed by the end of the Summer term 2002-03. It is planned to employ a project manager to take forward many of the longer term actions including reviewing the use of electronic registration, links to magistrates courts and the education welfare service.

8. NATIONAL COUNCIL-ELWA'S LEARNING CHALLENGE FUND (LCF)

The National Council's Learning Challenge Fund received 291 bids and to date 22 have received outright or conditional approval. Of these, 7 are national projects, 4 based in the South East, 2 in the North, 3 in Mid Wales and 6 in the South West. This number is expected to increase as revised applications are received and approved. Many of the bids were turned down because they did not meet the specific criteria published by ELWa. ELWa staff are now working with a number of unsuccessful applicants to ascertain how best to address the shortcomings in the original bids and to clarify areas where eligibility criteria could be better demonstrated.

Secondary Legislation

9. EDUCATION (REMISSION OF CHARGES RELATING TO RESIDENTIAL TRIPS) (WALES) REGULATION 2003

Section 200 of the Education Act 2002 which was commenced by the order approved by the Assembly on the 17 December 2002 replaces section 457, subsection (4) (entitlement to complete remission of charges in respect of board and lodging on a residential trip) paragraph b. Business Committee will consider the regulations on the 4th March.

The new regulations are required as a consequence of changes to the Child Tax Credit that come into force on the 6th April 2003.

The intended effect of this instrument is to align the entitlement to remission of boarding and lodging charges for pupils on residential trips with the entitlement provision for those enjoying free school meals.

The policy must provide for complete remission of any charges otherwise payable in respect of board and lodging for pupils on residential trips where a charge is not permissible in respect of the education provided on the trip and the child's parents are in receipt of certain tax credits.

The remission policy must apply to a pupil whose parent is entitled to Child Tax Credit but not to Working Tax Credit and the annual income of the parent does not exceed the current determined for the purposes of Section 7 (1)(a) of the Tax Credits Act 2002

The amount currently determined for the purpose of Section 7 (1)(a) of the Tax Credits Act 2002 is £13,230.

10. FREE SCHOOL LUNCHES REGULATIONS

Section 201 of the Education Act 2002 which was commenced by the Order approved by the Assembly on 17 December 2002 prospectively inserts section 512ZB of the Education Act 1996 and prospectively amends section 512 (3) of the same Act. It is therefore necessary for the Assembly to make the following Orders, which were considered by the Business Committee on 25 February.

The Education (Free School Lunches) (Prescribed Tax Credits) (Wales) Order 2003

The intended effect of this Instrument is to prescribe, for the purposes of section 512ZB of the Education Act 1996, that where a parent is in receipt of Child Tax Credit in the defined circumstances, his or her child is entitled to free school lunches. The defined circumstances are that the parent must not be in receipt of Working Tax Credit, and that his or her annual income must be below the amount prescribed for the purposes of section 7 (1)(a) of the Tax Credits Act 2002 (currently £13,230). An effect of changes to the child credit

and benefit system which come into effect on 6 April is that unless this Instrument is enacted some pupils would lose entitlement to free school meals and this would cancel out tax credit gain.

The Education (School Lunches) (Prescribed Requirements) (Wales) Order 2003

The intended effect of this Instrument is to prescribe, under section 512(3) (a) of the Education Act 1996, that a registered pupil who is receiving nursery education must be receiving full-time education to be entitled to a free school lunch. It also contains a transitional provision to prevent pupils in part-time nursery education who are currently receiving free school meals, from losing that entitlement. The existing legislation is considered impractical since it is not possible for a LEA to meet the requirement to provide a child with a free school lunch if the child does not usually attend during the lunch period. School sessions are defined as morning or afternoon in accordance with the Education (School Day and School Year)(Wales) Regulations 2000 (2000 No 1323 (W.101) so that unless a pupil attends full-time he or she will not be present for the lunch period.

11. THE EDUCATION (OUTTURN STATEMENTS) (WALES) REGULATIONS 2003

The Education (Budget Statement)(Wales) Regulations 2002 came into force in February 2002 and defined the format of the information that local authorities must publish prior to the start of the financial year in relation to planned expenditure in schools. These regulations reduced bureaucracy and avoided duplication by removing the requirement for LEA level information to be included in budget statements. Details relating to overall local authority budgets was already being captured in the Revenue Assessment (RA) forms submitted annually by local authorities to the Assembly.

As a direct result of the amendments to the regulations covering budget statements, consequential changes now need to be made to the regulations covering outturn statements. These are produced after the end of the financial year and outline planned expenditure, in-year adjustments and the actual expenditure incurred. The proposed Education (Outturn Statement)(Wales) Regulations 2003 will apply to outturn statements produced for the 2002-2003 financial year and will remove the requirement for LEA level outturn information to be included as this will be captured by revised Revenue Outturn (RO) forms covering overall local authority outturns. The proposed regulations also include a new requirement that the information should be provided in both Welsh and English.

The regulations were included in the list of forthcoming legislation provided to the ELL committee on 24 October 2002 and were also discussed in the meeting on 21 November where it was agreed that they could proceed via the accelerated procedure. Consultation has taken place with local authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, Teaching Unions and other

interested organisations. Only five responses were received but all were in favour of the proposed amendment.

A copy of the draft order will be placed on the intranet on 25 February and members are asked to note the proposal before the Assembly's Business Committee formally considers it on 11 March 2003.

12. ASSEMBLY LEGISLATION

As an annex to my report to the committee on 24 October 2002 I attached details of the secondary legislation covering Education and Lifelong Learning likely to be handled between October 2002 and March 2003. For your information an update of the table is included at Annex D. It now covers activity up to May 2003 and includes detail of twelve Statutory Instruments, which have been added since the previous report.