

Education Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee

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Date: May 3 2006

Time: 9.00am-12.30pm

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

The Learning Country

I published The Learning Country 2 for consultation on 7 April. Copies were placed in the Library. The draft strategy builds on the significant progress which has been made since publication of the original Learning Country document in 2001. The Learning Country 2 sets out a comprehensive programme of action to complete the implementation of the Assembly Government's education, lifelong learning and skills agenda by 2010. The document focuses on the key challenges still remaining in Wales. The emphasis is on:

- continuing to raise standards;
- tackling remaining inequalities and disparities in educational outcomes;
- bringing services ever closer to the citizen and local communities;
- continuing to improve skills to better serve the needs of individuals and employers;
- broadening learning opportunities still further and enhancing vocational learning;
- supporting and developing practitioners in all settings; and
- greater collaboration and partnership working to help deliver "Making the Connections".

The Learning Country 2 identifies the key actions that the Assembly Government will take forward over the coming years in relation to early years, schools, special educational needs, the 14-19 agenda, children and young people's participation, further and higher education, skills, and supporting practitioners. The consultation paper has been distributed very widely to around 2,500 stakeholders. The consultation period runs until 30th June this year and I intend to publish the final strategy document in the autumn.

RAISE – Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education Grant

On 5 April I announced the new Assembly Government grant scheme aimed at raising attainment and individual standards of education in Wales. A copy of my Cabinet statement is at annex B to this report. On that day I briefed education spokespersons of the opposition parties on the grant proposals.

I undertook to report the proposals to the Committee on 3 May and to take account of the views of the Committee in finalising the grant arrangements.

The total funding for the scheme is £16m this year (2006-07), with the intention that the same level of funding will be available in 2007-08. The total is made up of £13m of funding for Wales consequential on the Chancellor's budget last month and £3m included in my MEG in the additional revenue funding for schools line. Transfer of the £13m new money to the ELLS MEG for this purpose is subject to the approval of the Assembly in plenary.

The intention is to allocate the funding

- to support disadvantaged pupils in schools where 20% or more of those pupils are eligible for free school meals (excluding schools with fewer than 50 pupils);
- for learning support for looked after children
- to resource a small number of school improvement professionals to work with local authorities and support schools in receipt of the new funding; and to run and evaluate the programme

The allocations to schools will amount to £14.4m distributed by reference to numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals. Around a third of primary schools, a third of secondary schools and some 30 special schools will receive funding. A summary of amounts by local authority and a final list of schools will be circulated later this week.

Preliminary assessment of PLASC data for 2006 suggests that a small number of primary schools not eligible on the basis of the 2005 figures will move into the 20% or more of pupils eligible for free school meals band. Once the PLASC data has been verified these schools will be added to the list of those to receive funding, probably towards the end of the summer term.

The intention is to pay the grant to local authorities, but to require them to pass on the specified amounts to schools. To ensure that the funding is used for the intended purpose each school will have to agree its use and the intended outcomes for pupils with the local authority, who will in turn have to notify the plans to the Assembly Government before the funding is released. Notification of planned allocations of grant will be sent to authorities at the end of the week of 1 May so that local authorities and schools can make a start on planning use of the allocations. Authorities will need to notify the plans to the Assembly Government by around the third week in June so that grant allocation can be confirmed in time for schools to set up programmes and projects for September. Confirmation of grant allocations will only take place after Assembly approval of the MEG motion has been secured. Schools will be advised that the funding is to continue in 2007-08 and that they should therefore plan for two school years of activity.

Schools will be required to target the funding on supporting pupils who are disadvantaged and most at risk of leaving school with no qualifications. Eligible uses of the funding will include additional support in the classroom; withdrawal of pupils from the classroom for activities focused on literacy, numeracy or other aspects of learning; out of hours activities; development of home-school links; revision weeks, support from the community, collaboration with FE institutions or other partners; behaviour support; improving attendance.

Local authorities will need to ensure that use of the funding draws on established good practice in school improvement, is consistent with individual school improvement plans and, in the case of secondary schools, fits with the plans of the local 14-19 partnership. For primary schools authorities will be asked to bring individual schools together into groups wherever possible so that use of shares of funding can be maximised for the benefit of the targeted groups of pupils in those schools.

Each local authority will receive a share of £1m to support the learning of looked after pupils – particularly those in years 10 and 11 – so as to enable them to move on to further and higher education or to work-based learning. The arrangements are due to be discussed by the Education of Looked After Children Stakeholder Group which is due to meet on 5 May. The group includes representatives of the key interests. I will report further to the committee on the arrangements for distribution and use of the grant when these consultations have been completed.

There has been discussion with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales about the arrangements for the RAISE grant. They have signalled that the proposals are workable and are consistent with their own wish to see the link broken between disadvantage and low attainment.

Immersion and Intensive Language Teaching Pilot Projects

As promised at the ELL Committee on 16 March, I attach at Annexes C and D copies in English and Welsh of the Report on Welsh immersion and intensive language teaching pilot projects in schools to date, published by Estyn on 15 March.

This is a very positive and balanced report. The key positive findings are that:

- the vast majority of pupils taking part in the projects have made significant gains in their language skills and their knowledge and understanding of Welsh
- there were examples of good and outstanding teaching during the periods of intensive teaching
- the projects were well planned – with significant input from the project team at the Welsh Language Board, particularly in terms of specialist training
- each model offered value for money
- LEAs have been supportive
- pupils' attitudes were very positive, as were the attendance levels
- some projects have produced better outcomes than others

The report also identified a number of issues which require further attention:

- some models are not immersion projects but do raise standards in Welsh second language
- the need to share and disseminate good practice
- preparation time for teachers to tailor and differentiate materials
- whether extra-curricular activities could be used to supplement the projects
- the need to ensure that the teachers' linguistic skills are at an appropriate level
- the dearth of resources and materials suitable for late immersion

- the need for careful planning for continuity and progression at the secondary level

The Report makes a number of recommendations including four aimed at the Welsh Assembly Government. I have accepted these in principle and I have invited the Steering Group which oversees the projects to consider these and the emerging issues as part of their ongoing development of the programme.

Athrawon Bro

A number of changes have been introduced to teacher's pay from January 2006. In particular, management allowances have been replaced by Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments.

The issue surrounding the eligibility of members of the Athrawon Bro team to be considered for the award of TLRs under the new pay arrangements has been raised by UCAC. Representations have been made directly to me and through correspondence with Janet Ryder AM.

The terms and conditions of employment of the Athrawon Bro team can vary between Local Education Authorities and within the team itself. The LEA is responsible for managing and organising the teams of Athrawon Bro and has a clear system in place for the management and accountability of the service within their area.

The majority of Athrawon Bro are qualified teachers centrally employed by the LEA under the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and many of these teachers will be receiving management allowances. However, other members of the team depending on their contract of employment, expertise and qualifications might be employed with different terms and conditions of service and remunerated against a different pay scale.

The contribution of the 'Athrawon Bro' to teaching Welsh in the schools of Wales is an important one. They fulfil an important role by offering guidance to schools on methods of teaching Welsh within the curriculum, as well as offering support to teachers who teach through the medium of Welsh. During the last few years there has been more emphasis on developing the function of athrawon bro from the perspective of offering specimen lessons and support that will enable class teachers to take more responsibility for their lessons. They offer ideas and advice on aspects that deal with the methodology of teaching a language, and they are also a valuable source of information about suitable teaching materials.

A contribution is made to the funds of the athrawon bro service through a grant that is allocated annually to the 22 LEAs by the Welsh Language Board. For the 2006-07 financial year the Board received £2,312,000 of ring fenced funding, and a further £407,252 was added to this making a total of £2,719,252. In accordance with the terms of this grant, every authority contributes a minimum of 25 % towards the total cost of every activity that is accomplished in the grant context; a number of counties contribute significantly more than the 25%. The strategy that determines the direction of the athrawon bro's work denotes four aspects: the athrawon bro's work; centres for late comers; residential courses and experimental schemes, where there is emphasis on encouraging the counties

to use pioneering methods to promote linguistic continuity between the key stages, for instance, or using music or art to strengthen linguistic skills. The Board has not been in a situation to support new experimental schemes for the last two years. In determining targets for the work with the counties, the Board co-operates by encouraging emphasis on fields such as linguistic continuity and bridging strategies. Recently the new developments within the field of education have stimulated discussions on issues such as the role of the athrawon bro within the Foundation Phase (and in particular the attention given to bilingualism). It is important that the expertise of the athrawon bro is recognised, but it is also important to look at methods of ensuring that their knowledge and experience is weaved into these far reaching developments in a sustainable and strategic way.

Estyn Survey of Vetting Procedures in Schools

On 17 January, I made a statement to the Assembly outlining the outcomes of Ruth Kelly's review of arrangements for vetting those working with children and barring those who are unsuitable.

In addition, on 24 January, I wrote to all those working in the education sector in Wales, explaining the implications of that review and confirming the procedures that I expect all schools and other relevant education institutions to undertake to ensure that those who are unsuitable to work with children continue to be denied access through the education sector

My letter also indicated that I had asked Estyn to carry out an urgent survey of existing vetting practice in a sample of schools. That survey has been completed and a copy of Estyn's report has been circulated to the Committee.

The survey comprised short notice inspection visits to 28 schools, together with telephone surveys of all 22 local education authorities, 4 further education colleges and a number of supply teaching agencies. The survey also drew upon inspection evidence from other sectors of education and training, including work-based learning, independent schools and area inspections.

The survey confirmed that the procedures for obtaining disclosures from the Criminal Records Bureau are in place and effectively exercised in all of the schools surveyed. Similarly, procedures for the take up of professional and character references are satisfactory.

There is some room for improvement in a minority of schools in respect of the take up of academic and professional qualifications and responding to information about staff suitability.

However, the report also identifies that there are a number of areas that are unsatisfactory and need to be addressed. These relate to confirming an applicant's registration with the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW), their medical fitness, the availability of information about staff employed from overseas, record keeping, pupils receiving education off-site and the wider workforce and visitors.

Some of the issues highlighted are already covered in guidance and we will need to consider how best we can continue to keep the need for effective procedures at the forefront of employers' minds. Other issues will need further consideration, including the need for supplementary guidance.

I shall keep the Committee updated on progress through future Reports.

Introduction of new provisions to the Education and Inspections (E&I) Bill for Wales for looked after children (LACs).

Government amendments were tabled on 18 April for looked after children (LAC) including a new clause for the Bill to apply to Wales only. The amendments will permit the Assembly to make regulations about the admission of LAC to maintained schools in Wales. LAC are a vulnerable group and are more likely to change schools than other learners. The new clause will ensure that the Assembly is able to put in place regulations about the admission of such children to maintained schools. Admission authorities would be required to make provision as prescribed and would have to admit LAC in prescribed circumstances even if the school of choice was full.

The new clause has been drafted to permit the Assembly to use its discretion in the drafting of regulations. Any regulations would be subject to consultation with stakeholders prior to introduction and would be subject to the Assembly's regulation making procedure.

Provision for LAC could have been made using the framework power in clause 154 by virtue of its relationship with school admissions. However it was thought preferable to introduce legislation more quickly by creating a regulation making power on the face of the Bill rather than delay action until the framework power was developed.

The Government is also introducing amendments for new provisions for LAC in England. These differ in that they include a role for the schools adjudicator, an office which does not exist in Wales. None of the amendments will permit an authority in England to direct an admissions authority in Wales to admit LAC and reciprocally the Assembly will not be permitted to direct admissions authorities in England.

Launch of Learning Pathways Guidance II and 14-19 Action Plan

I will be launching the Learning Pathways 14 – 19 Guidance 2nd edition this afternoon (3rd May) at the Wales Millennium Centre. The second edition of the Learning Pathways 14 – 19 Guidance enhances and extends the sound foundation based on the experience and expertise of all sectors in Wales set out in the first edition. It demonstrates the progress that has been made since the commitment in The Learning Country (2001) to the transformation of 14 –19 provision.

Following the Deputy Ministers Report on 14 -19 Learning Pathways in Wales, which was formally launched on 9th November 2005 interested parties have had the opportunity to respond. The Action Plan now forms an important part of the Guidance. The Action Plan sets out recommendations at a strategic and operational level which will drive forward the 14 -19 agenda. The Action Plan was discussed at the Committee on 29th March 2006.

This Action Plan will drive forward the transformation of education and training opportunities available to young people in the 14 -19 age group. The plan sets out the following major actions to

take place from 2006 to 2010:

- the development of an Employers' Concordat to encourage and secure employer commitment
- making the Welsh Baccalaureate available to all learners
- revising current national curriculum at Key Stage 4 to align better with Learning Pathways
- securing high quality learning and personal support and impartial advice for all learners
- providing choice of high quality work related and general options for learners
- creating a new learning infrastructure to provide the collaborative framework of Learning Pathways
- offering high quality work related education in priority economic sectors throughout Wales
- establishing the learning framework including qualifications, wider experiences and learning and personal support
- securing better synchronised funding arrangements to facilitate learners' access to choice and flexibility.

An additional £41m has been made available up to 2008 to support new aspects of Learning Pathways. However, the action plan makes clear that alongside the additional funding, money already allocated to 14-19 learning will in future need to be re-directed where relevant to ensure access for all learners to the six key elements of Learning Pathways.

The Guidance II and Action Plan will be published and distributed together over the next few weeks.

A Strategic Framework for Economic Development and Lifelong Learning within the Construction Sector in Wales

Andrew Davies and I announced on 30th March that during the course of 2006-07 we will prepare and publish a strategy for the construction sector, focusing particularly on raising skills. This is one of the first fruits of the ASPB merger process that has created DELLS and DEIN, working together to meet the needs of businesses and learners. The strategy will aim to (a) improve forward planning and vision for the economic growth of the sector, (b) move towards a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to the planning and supply of business support and learning provision which is responsive to the emerging needs of the sector and (c) maximise opportunities both social and economic from the planned investment in construction projects across Wales. In order to 'kick-start' this initiative we have identified some specific items for early progress, targeted initially in the Heads of the Valleys area.

The Strategy will:

- Establish a strategic forum for the sector;
- Introduce a more co-ordinated approach to the planning of learning provision;
- Extend and refine the work of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in their development of Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) and enhance the evidence base. This will bring about a more cohesive approach to the joint planning for the wider 'built environment' consisting of employers within the Construction Skills, Asset Skills, Summit Skills and Energy and Utility Skills SSC 'footprints'

- Highlight and build upon good work already in place and extend it across Wales in a co-ordinated and managed way.
- Offer opportunity to a range of partners to develop strategic approaches to construction-related business and skills development, consistent with the criteria for the next tranche of European funding.
- Support the development of complementary provision to existing FE/HE/ Private provider provision.
- Develop Wales' identity as a centre for innovative approaches to sustainable construction within the broader 'Built Environment'

EARLALL General Assembly, Granada – 16-17 March

I attended an EARLALL General Assembly meeting in Granada on 17 March and my officials attended the EARLALL Board on 16 March on my behalf. Political representatives from new member regions - Baden Wurttemberg, Brittany and Jamtland (Sweden) - were attending the General Assembly for the first time.

European Budget 2007-13

One particularly significant development that was discussed is the agreement reached by EU leaders on the budget for 2007-13 and the implications for budgets in a number of areas, including education, youth and culture, which are lower than those included in the Commission's original proposal. The EARLALL meetings discussed lobbying for protection of elements of the prospective new Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme (ILLP) that are important to EARLALL members.

Officials have been involved in discussions with DfES regarding the UK Government's position and have now put forward the Assembly Government's priorities regarding the relative weightings of the various lifelong learning programmes to contribute to the final DfES paper to the Commission on the ILLP. In particular, officials expressed our views that Grundtvig and the Transversal elements should be protected: Grundtvig, given its importance in offering potential funding to people with low skills, both employed and unemployed, particularly through Wales' three lifelong learning networks working to motivate local people and regenerate their local areas; and the Transversal strand, notably in the realm of language learning and linguistic diversity. EARLALL has already submitted a response to the Commission, at the beginning of the year that focussed on the transversal strand of the new lifelong learning programme. Together with the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport, I am also very keen that funding for projects with a regional and minority language dimension be supported through the new programme.

EQF and key competencies

I was delighted that representatives of EARLALL member regions were able to attend the Budapest conference in February on key competencies for lifelong learning, where the Commission presented the results of its EQF consultation. The conference found broad consensus across the EU on a number of issues relating to the EQF. EARLALL actively fed into this process and issued its own response to the consultation at the beginning of the year.

As I previously reported, I spoke at Scotland's UK Presidency conference on European Qualification Framework, last September. We will build on our good contacts with Scottish colleagues concerned with qualifications frameworks and credit transfer in preparing a response to an anticipated call from the Commission for project proposals in this area later in the year.

Multilingualism and Regional and Minority Languages

The meeting also agreed the importance of lobbying for regional and minority language communities to be represented on the Commission's prospective High Level Group on Multilingualism. I have arranged for EARLALL to make appropriate representations to Commissioner Figel urging the inclusion of regional and minority language interests, and offering to nominate experts for the Group.

Technical Group on Adult Education

The Association agreed to establish a Technical Group to advise the Commission on the drafting of a communication on adult education to be chaired by Professor Federighi of the University of Florence. I would hope to offer nominations of officers from the new DELLS Learning and Skills Group or NIACE Dysgu Cymru to this adult education group

Joint Working Agreements

Officials from Wales have been working with their counterparts from other regions on draft EARLALL 'Statements of Intent' and a model 'Mobility Agreement'. These agreements are intended to frame joint working between regions and organisations in the field of lifelong learning, formalising and clarifying what cooperation is agreed.

Other Developments

Other developments include a forthcoming contribution from Wales to an EARLALL survey on regional activity in developing entrepreneurial skills.

EARLALL regions, including Wales, have taken a leadership role in organising a conference at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on 3 - 4 May entitled "The regional dimension of the EU e-learning agenda".

The report on Wales' UK Presidency Event: Mobilising Experience on Transferring Best Practise in Europe is currently being finalised and will soon be posted on the EARLALL, as well as the Assembly Government's own, website.

The active participation of three new members and collective agreement to a wide range of joint activities made this a very successful General Assembly. EARLALL continues to grow in size and influence, feeding the regional experience into the development of both policy and practice across Europe. The next General Assembly will be in Brussels in the autumn where the Association aims to cement relations with some new personnel within the European Commission and also further develop

its relationship with the Committee of the Regions and European Parliament.

Regional and Minority Languages Conference

On 27 April I was one of a number of Education Ministers who delivered an address to a Conference on Regional and Minority Languages in Education Systems in Brussels. Also among the speakers from Wales were Professor Colin Baker of Bangor University and Meirion Prys Jones, Chief Executive of the Welsh Language Board. As well as speakers and delegates from the European Commission, there were speakers from about 18 countries or regions across Europe.

The conference was one of the activities foreseen by the Commission Communication "Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity – An Action Plan 2004-2006". It aims to encourage co-operation and networking on issues affecting regional and minority languages in education and training systems. The Conference consisted of a number of workshops:

- Transmission within the families
- Integration through education – The Ghandi project
- Through bilingualism to multilingualism
- The effectiveness of bilingual education
- Teacher-training for regional and minority languages
- Language awareness and linguistic diversity
- ICT in multilingual education
- Interaction in the classroom
- Education through the medium of regional and minority languages
- Lifelong language learning

My speech concentrated on the importance of making the most of the excellent work carried out under European funded projects like EuroLang and Mercator and the need to sustain that excellence. I gave an outline of some of the initiatives which we have been pursuing in Wales, from which I believe other countries could learn but I also emphasised that we, too, could learn from the experience of others. I welcomed the European Commission's recent activities in the language arena, particularly in the context of access to relevant EU funding programme for regional and minority languages from next year. As the Committee would expect I gave my full support to the proposal to establish a high level group on multilingualism and to organise a Ministerial conference on the subject.