

# Education Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee

**ELLS(2) 09-06(p1)**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>7 June 2006</b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>9.00am</b>
<b>Title :</b>	<b>Minister's Report</b>

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

## 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 will issue the Estyn Report, together with an initial Assembly Government response, to local authorities as soon as possible. I will ensure that copies also issue to members of the Committee.

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

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

Andrew Davies and I announced on 30<sup>th</sup> 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'

## **Implementation of Clywch Report Recommendation 21.5 – Whistleblowing**

At the meeting on 16 March, at which I gave a report on progress on implementation of the Clywch Report recommendations, I agreed to bring to a future meeting the draft guidance to be issued to school governing bodies on whistleblowing procedures for school staff together with a model whistleblowing policy for school staff for governing bodies to adopt.

A consultation document on such draft guidance and a model policy has now been prepared and a copy is at Annex B I anticipate that the consultation document will be issued for consultation before the end of June 2006.

## **Special School Pilot Projects.**

I should like to inform you of the £5.1million made available to 22 LEAs in Wales to establish Special School Pilot Projects as outlined in my Cabinet Written Statement on 5 May attached as Annex C. As part of the Assembly's wider strategy to RAISE standards for disadvantaged groups, this complementary pilot aims to develop the role of special schools in establishing practical links with mainstream schools in support of pupils with special educational needs. The money will be made available over 3 years, from September 2006.

This pilot aims to promote the use of special schools as a community focussed resource base. We will seek bids from LEAs in collaboration with special schools on proposals relating to a range of outreach practices including:

- Support for individuals in mainstream settings – advice and guidance for mainstream schools
- Delivering training – formal and informal to a range of settings and services
- Modelling and coaching – mainstream and specialist staff working together to enhance their skills and knowledge
- Sharing specialist resources – such as specialist equipment and communication aids to enable pupils to access the curriculum
- Working with parents and carers – providing support, advice and guidance
- Multi-agency support and provision – working with the statutory and voluntary agencies to increase capacity and meet the holistic needs of their pupils
- Improved transition arrangements post 16 – working with FE institutions and developing work based learning opportunities in collaboration with local businesses.

Whilst pilot projects can be developed in a single authority, local authorities are also asked to consider the benefits of developing services of this nature on a regional basis, thereby increasing their capacity and specialisms in different areas of SEN.

Projects must be seen as part of the LEAs wider school improvement agenda. Pilot projects should aim

to support an inclusive education system in Wales thereby ensuring wherever possible and appropriate pupils needs are met within their local mainstream school but where access to specialist provision is required it is of the highest standard and works in partnership with other providers.

Where an authority has limited or no special school provision they may wish to submit proposals for further development of sharing expertise on a regional basis or by using the approach outlined above in developing the role of resource bases attached to mainstream schools. Where special school provision exists this should be central to any proposals submitted as priority will be given to developing the role of special schools in this context.

## **Wales Audit Office - School Funding Analysis. Assembly Government**

### Response

The Wales Audit Office published its report entitled 'School Funding Analysis' on 9 March and it was considered by the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 16 March. I commissioned the report in August 2005 to provide an independent analysis of the reasons for the variations in LEA per pupil level spend in Wales. The report's conclusions provide a rationale for the arrangements we have for funding schools in Wales through the local government revenue settlement.

The report made five recommendations – two for the Assembly Government, one for the Assembly Government jointly with council officers and two for councils. I indicated when the report was discussed in March that I expected to be able to respond positively to the recommendations for the Assembly Government. I am pleased to do so formally, as set out below.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

R1. In its next review of the distribution of Education IBA, with local government, assess whether the level of eligibility for free schools meal represents the best indicator of deprivation.

Accepted. Responsibility for this recommendation lies with the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services. Officials in her department have already begun consideration of the issue as part of a wider review of how deprivation is taken in to account in the Standard Spending Assessment formula within the local government revenue settlement. It is expected that the review will be completed in time for consideration in the 2008-09 settlement.

R2. State clearly the limitations as a basis of comparison of the education finance data that is reported annually.

Accepted. All statistical bulletins and other statistical reports on education finance data produced by the Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate are supported by relevant commentary and footnotes, and limitations in comparability of data are explained where appropriate. Nonetheless, we are seeking advice from the WAO on the particular improvements we might make to clarify such limitations and will reflect that in time for publication of the next education finance

statistical paper, which will be the analysis of LEA budgets set for 2006-07 to be provided to the Committee in July.

The Welsh Assembly Government and council officers should:

R3. Work together to achieve consistency in the way in which 2007-08 Revenue Account forms are completed and the Welsh Assembly Government should subsequently issue revised guidance.

Accepted. Officials in Schools Management Division and the Statistical Directorate will take the lead in working with local government to ensure guidance on the completion of Revenue Account forms is clear and understood by local government so as increase the consistency of education finance data returned from local authorities with effect from the next financial year.

The remaining two recommendations are for local government. I have written to Councillor John Davies, lead education and lifelong learning spokesperson for the Welsh Local Government Association to seek the WLGA's response to these recommendations in a form that I can share with the Committee on 7 June.

## **DWP IB Reforms – Towns and Cities Strategy**

My portfolio covers not only education and training but also responsibility for working with the UK Government on the shared agenda to raise levels of economic activity. I see my objectives for learning and for overcoming inactivity as being very closely linked. I, and the First Minister, have therefore taken a close interest in the recent Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) consultation paper on the reforms of Incapacity Benefit, "A new deal for welfare: Empowering people to work". I fully supported the First Minister's response to the Green Paper and my officials have been working closely with DWP in taking our issues forward.

One issue raised concerned DWP's proposal to pilot a new initiative, called 'Cities Strategy', in areas of deprivation in major UK cities only. This proposal takes no account of 'non city' areas where there may also be large pockets of poverty, low skills, poor health and economic inactivity, as in the South Wales Valleys. I can report that DWP acknowledged our concerns and have now widened this to all areas where there is an identified need.

DWP intends to pilot this 'towns and cities' strategy in a small number of pathfinder areas to test the view that by providing a mechanism to join up the work of different agencies, it will make better use of existing funding to tackle problems in deprived areas in a holistic way i.e. low skills, poor health, low employment, and poverty. My officials, who are representing the Welsh Assembly Government on DWP's 'towns and cities' project board, have secured a 'pathfinder area' for Wales and will be working closely with both our interested partnership groups and DWP to bring this about. One of the objectives I shall wish to see included will be the provision of the necessary learning and skills route-way to enable people to not only find work but to progress within that employment.

In order to provide advice and guidance to our partners on how to put forward their proposals to tackle deprivation in their areas, my officials held a Welsh Stakeholder event on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>

June. Attendees included representatives from local authorities, Jobcentre Plus, the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action and Wales Spatial Plan partnership groups. I will update the Committee verbally on these outcomes.

## **Minister's report on Wales Education Show 2006**

I am pleased to report that I gave the Keynote Address at the Wales Education Show on 26 May. The event was very successful and allowed practitioners, consultants and pupils to share their knowledge and experiences. This year the showcased Authority was Caerphilly.

The programme for the event was very comprehensive and the conference held 74 seminars and workshops on important issues such as Early Years, Transition, Pedagogy, Special Education Needs, and Professional Development among others.

This event is a national event which enables people involved in the education and nursery care professions to seek advice, resources, tips, skills and ideas, from birth right the way through to post 16 education.

At this event, I was pleased to endorse the Governors Wales 'Principles of Conduct for Governors of Schools in Wales'. Governors Wales' view was that to enable governors to carry out their responsibilities and duties effectively, it is useful to have a written set of principles that governors can refer to. It is Governors Wales intention that all governors across Wales will receive a copy of The 'Principles of Conduct' which is attached at Annex D.

## **Fforwm Iaith**

I attended the Assembly Government's second meeting of the Fforwm Iaith in the impressive setting of the recently opened National Waterfront Museum in Swansea on 16 May.

The Fforwm Iaith is chaired by the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language & Sport and provides an opportunity for everyone with an interest in the Welsh language to constructively discuss ideas and suggestions about how to increase the use of Welsh and to create a bilingual Wales. The theme on this occasion was "The Benefits of Bilingual Education" and also present was Professor Colin Baker, a member of the Welsh Language Board and renowned worldwide expert on bilingualism. Professor Baker gave a compelling presentation on the advantages of bilingual education and the audience were then able to engage with myself on issues relating to bilingual education.

Colin Baker's presentation and an account of the meeting will be available shortly at: [http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/welsh\\_language/fforwm\\_iaith](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/welsh_language/fforwm_iaith).

## **Merger of the University of Glamorgan and Merthyr College**

The merger of Merthyr Tydfil College with the University of Glamorgan, the first of its kind in Wales, was effected on 18 May 2006. This follows a long history of close co-operation and merger discussions between the two institutions.

As you are aware, Merthyr Tydfil is an area of relatively low economic activity, with a weak skill base and a dependence on old industry and public sector employment. A number of initiatives are in place to address this situation. At the centre of these is the fundamental principle that economic and social improvements will flow from a population which is better educated and more highly skilled to take forward the opportunities which exist. The benefits of this merger were robustly analysed and measured by both ELWa and Welsh Assembly Government officials, to ensure that the integration would benefit both the community and local economic regeneration.

Briefly, the merger will enable the College to benefit from the staff expertise and resources of the University of Glamorgan, allowing the joint development quality provision, which will maximise opportunities for young people, the community and employers, in both further and higher education. Indeed, this development will facilitate a smoother transition from further education to higher education.

Other key benefits include:

- a substantial advancement of Welsh Assembly Government and Merthyr Tydfil Council plans to revitalise the Heads of the Valleys region;
- improvement and expansion of learner opportunities in Merthyr Tydfil;
- expansion of curricula and offering to better meet local needs, including all 14 – 19 learning, in collaboration with other providers;
- a substantial increase in resources available for business support in the area; and
- quality and output improvements through shared advances in pedagogy and quality management systems.

The success and impact of this ground breaking merger will be monitored and over the next three years in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). On this basis, the merger is very much welcome.

## **RAISE: Grant to Support the Education of Looked After Children**

On 5 April I announced initial details of a major new programme aimed at raising attainment and individual standards of education in schools in Wales. The programme is to be known as RAISE and will target disadvantaged pupils.

In all £15.4m will be distributed under the RAISE programme in 2006/07. £1m of the funding will be distributed to local authorities as a separate grant specifically for the purposes of supporting the education of looked after children. The grant will also be in place for 2007/08.

The intention of the grant is to facilitate educational support for LAC of the sort that parents would normally provide for their children, particularly when their children are approaching crucial public examinations at age 16. In doing so I hope we can kick start improvements in the educational attainment of looked after children and encourage them to move on to further and higher education and training. We need to ensure that these young people are given every opportunity to overcome the difficult circumstances which they have had to endure in their lives.

The grant supports other current Assembly Government initiatives to improve the lives of children

looked after by authorities, which include the Children First programme (objectives 2 and 5) and the implementation of new planning arrangements and other duties of co-operation in the Children Act 2004. The Assembly Government has recently set-up a Stakeholder Group with the specific remit of considering how the education and training of LAC may be improved, with a particular emphasis on supporting and encouraging more of these young people to move on to further and higher education or into work-based training.

The grant will be distributed according to the Children's Services standard spending assessment formula used in the 2006/07 local government settlement. Each local authority will therefore receive a share of the grant and these are shown in Annex E. Local authorities have been asked to provide their proposals for use of the grant to the Assembly Government by the end of June, including the outcome measures which they will use to measure the effect on individuals' attainment. They will be notified of approval of the grant in early July, in order to put in place the new support in time for the start of the 2006-07 academic year.

The grant will be channelled through the Lead Director of Children's Services to reflect the new planning arrangements which are likely to be in place in the Autumn. I will be expecting authorities who are the corporate parent of looked after children to work closely with the authority which is currently providing the education – which in some cases may be some distance away. In this way I hope the grant will help in improving links between children's services and education departments and between different authorities and that these links can be maintained in the longer term.

## Background

The current timetable for grant approval is as follows:

- June 5<sup>th</sup> - notification to authorities of shares of £1m for support of LAC
- June 30<sup>th</sup> – deadline for receipt of authorities' funding proposals by ANID
- July 10<sup>th</sup> - checking of spending proposal and formal notification by ANID of grant allocations to enable authorities, schools and other partners to put in hand arrangements for programmes/ projects to start in September.

A press release will also be issued on June 5<sup>th</sup>.

The grant notification letter has been cleared with ADEW and ADSS and its underlying principles previously with the WLGA.

The principles of the grant had previously been discussed and broadly agreed in the Education and Training of Looked After Children Stakeholder Group on May 5<sup>th</sup> .

ADEW recommended that the grant should be channelled through the Lead Director for Children's Service to reflect the new planning arrangements which are likely to be in place from September rather than the Chief Executive. The letter has been changed accordingly.

## **Membership of the Stakeholder Group for the Education and Training of Looked After Children**



Chair: Gerson Davies, Director of Education, Pembrokeshire LEA

## **National Assembly for Wales**

Ian Butler, Cabinet Adviser for Children

David Egan Special Adviser for Education

Graham Davies and Stephanie Hector Pupil Engagement Team

Ruth Hayton, Youth Access and Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Donna Davies and Jacqui Moyle, Children First Team

Kath Worsey, Higher Education Division

Rhonwyn Dobbing, Social Services Inspectorate for Wales

Joan Lockett, Planning Provision and Funding Division

Paul Webb, Housing Division

## **External Stakeholders**

Jane Johns, Senior Policy Manager, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

Suzanne Metcalfe, Business Manager, Careers Wales North East

Sue Barker, Caerphilly, local authority children's services, ADSS

Mike de Val, Torfaen, Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW)

Mike Lewis, Children's Voluntary Sector (through Children in Wales)

Deborah Jones, Chief Executive, Voices from Care

Ann Keane, Estyn

Daisy Seabourne and Emily Warren, WLGA

Ann Malyn, Newport, LAC Education coordinators

Rachel Hills, IRO, Wrexham

Paul Foley, Wales Leaving Care Forum

Maria Boffey, the Fostering Network

Gareth Jones, Policy Officer, Children's Commissioner for Wales

Gerri McAndrew, Chief Executive, The Frank Buttle Trust

Dolores Davey, Cardiff University, Research