

# Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee

## ELLS(2) 12-06(p1)

**Date: 20 Medi 2006**

**Lleoliad: Ystafell Bwyllgora 3, y Senedd, Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru**

**Amser: 9:00am**

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

### **1. Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. External Evaluation-Final Report**

At the meeting of the ELL Committee on 8 February we discussed the interim report of the independent external evaluation of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification pilot project. The Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning (CDELL), based at Nottingham University, published its final report of the evaluation in August. Copies have been sent to all members of the ELLS Committee.

I welcome this report which confirms that we have a qualification that is fit for purpose. It confirms the positive feedback we have been receiving from the internal evaluation, which was built into the project from the outset, and from learners and staff at the 31 pilot centres across Wales.

CDELL's report was published a week before the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Advanced Diploma results were announced on 17 August. Those results, and the Intermediate Diploma results on 24 August, further demonstrated that the Welsh Bac is making excellent progress in the pilot centres. It is giving our students the best possible preparation for both Higher Education and employment. Press coverage of the Summer examination results emphasised the need for a broader more rounded approach to education and the development of skills. The Welsh Baccalaureate is doing this. We in Wales are leading the way.

CDELL's report made a number of recommendations on issues that need to be addressed in order to roll-out the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in post-16 provision. Officials are working on the detail of these recommendations and I will make an announcement shortly about plans for roll-out.

One issue that I believe is very important for the long term future of the Welsh Bac is that it must be a qualification that will cover the entire 14-19 age range. I was therefore delighted to announce on 25<sup>th</sup> May that the pilot was to be expanded from this September. The Foundation Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is now being piloted across the 14-19 age range alongside the Intermediate model. This meets and goes beyond our commitment in "Wales a Better Country" and

increases the links between the Welsh Bac and the Assembly's wider 14-19 agenda.

## 2. External Examination Results

Students across the UK collected their external examination results in August and I am pleased to report that students in Wales were able to celebrate some real successes. Entries and pass rates were up for A and AS levels as well as for GCSEs and the second year of Advanced Welsh Bac saw 483 students achieving the full Diploma.

The results published in August do not provide data on key indicators such as the proportion of young people gaining 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C; these will be available later in the term and I shall report them to committee at that stage. In the interim Committee will be pleased to note the very encouraging overall picture that the pass rate data shows for students in Wales.

### A Levels

- 2006 has seen an overall increase in A Level entry of 2.87% across Wales.
- Overall pass rates at A Level are up 0.1 percentage points on 2005 with 96.9% achieving grades A – E.
- 23.9% of awards were at grade A an increase of 0.2 percentage points.
- The gap between the overall performance of boys and girls has decreased by 0.6 percentage points in the last 12 months.

### AS Levels

- 2005 has seen an overall increase in AS entry of 1.5% across Wales.
- There was a small decrease (-0.1 percentage points) in the overall AS pass rate (Grades A – E) compared to 2005, taking it to 87.5%.
- 18.0% of awards were at grade A; a small decrease of -0.3 percentage points on 2005.
- The gap between the overall performance of boys and girls has again narrowed by a further 0.2 percentage points in the last 12 months.

### Welsh Bac Advanced Diploma

- 800 candidates were entered for the WBQ Advanced Diploma.
- 632 (79% of students entered) completed the WBQ Advanced Diploma
- 483 candidates (76% of those that completed the Diploma) have completed the Core and optional requirements and have been awarded the full WBQ Advanced Diploma.
- 550 candidates (87% of those that completed the Diploma) successfully completed the full Core Certificate of the WBQ Advanced Diploma
- The 82 candidates that did not achieve the Core Certificate achieved an average of 3 Key Skills Qualifications each.

### GCSE

- 2006 has seen an overall increase in GCSE entry in Wales of 1.3%.
- Overall pass rates at GCSE level are up by 0.4% on 2005 to 98.1%.
- Passes at A\* grade are up by 0.4% on 2005 to 6.3%.
- Passes at A\*-C are up by 1.0% on 2005 to 62.3

## Welsh Bac Intermediate Diploma

- Entry at February 2006 was 722
- So far 263 students have completed the Welsh Baccalaureate Intermediate Diploma after 1 year of study
- Pilot centres have indicated that up to 211 students have deferred completion until the next academic year – although this figure is a tentative one.
- 206 (78%) of the 263 students that have completed the programme have achieved the Core Certificate, including all 6 Key Skill Qualifications
- 167 (63%) students have successfully completed the full Welsh Baccalaureate Intermediate Diploma
- The 57 candidates that have completed the programme, but not achieved the Core Certificate have achieved an average of 3 Key Skill Qualifications each.

The decline in MFL entries nationally attracted considerable press coverage but I was delighted that MFL entries in Wales at both AS and A Level actually increased significantly this year. Whilst GCSE entries fell slightly by 1.2% this still reflects very well against the significantly higher decline in MFL entries reported nationally. GCSE results showed excellent performance at the higher GCSE grades for MFL in Wales compared to the National picture. These high standards at GCSE will hopefully encourage yet more young people to study MFL beyond GCSE in the coming years highlighting that our national languages strategy, Languages Count, is beginning to make an impact although we acknowledge that the full impact of the various initiatives under the strategy will inevitably take time to work through.

### **3. Administration of Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) and the Better Schools Fund- Assembly Government Response to the Report of the Audit Committee**

I have welcomed publication of this report by the Audit Committee which recognises the improvements which have already been made in the administration of the Better Schools Fund as well as making proposals for change. The link to the report is as follows

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/assemblydata/N0000000000000000000000000000046467.pdf>

The First Minister responded formally to the chairman of the Committee on 22 August and the response has been tabled for the Committee's consideration. A copy of the response is at Annex B and can be found on the Assembly website.

We have accepted all seven of the Committee's recommendations and set out the action which we will be taking in order to implement them.

The particular points to which I would like to draw attention to are:

- The Better Schools Fund has a key role in supporting innovation and new initiatives. It is important that we take all appropriate opportunities to streamline administration but we must also have regard to the key purpose of the grant in helping authorities respond to change and to maintaining clear financial accountability.
- I am committed to ensuring that the Better Schools Fund delivers value for money.
- The Wales Audit Office review took place during an exceptionally challenging period covering the transition from GEST to Better Schools Fund. Both the WAO and the Audit Committee's report have recognised the administrative improvements which were made during that period.
- These have continued.
- Planning milestones for the 2006-7 programme were all met successfully and we are on target to do the same for 2007-8. There has also been an increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, including the introduction of annual 'performance reviews' with individual authorities. New virement arrangements have been introduced successfully.
- The Better Schools Fund team worked closely with the Wales Audit Office during the review in order to ensure that opportunities for improvement were identified and implemented at an early stage. Accordingly, work is already well in hand in some of the key areas on which the Audit Committee has made recommendations.
- In particular, we have contracted with independent consultants Tribal for the delivery of evaluation guidance for local authorities and Assembly policy leads. Tribal have already provided advice to inform the assessment of local authority spending plans and proposals for revised management information requirements.

Formal guidance is being issued to all policy leads this month on their roles and responsibilities under the Better Schools Fund, including the need for improved dialogue with local authorities on the use and evaluation of grant and planning for what happens when grant comes to an end.

#### **4. Community Education and Learning**

Community Learning is funded through a variety of approaches. This includes direct funding to FE colleges, local authorities and providers such as the WEA and YMCA. In addition, we are piloting Learning Community Accounts, a new and innovative approach that targets the learning needs of communities. I am also working with other ministers in tackling future training needs for community development.

In the case of funding to FE colleges, funding is not earmarked for Community Learning. This enables the college to determine how to deploy funds to best serve their communities. Funding made available to FE Colleges has been increasing. In the funding year that started in 2004, the total recurrent funding made available to colleges was ?243.4 million. In the current year, although one element is still to be finalised, I anticipate the equivalent fund to be about ?265 million. This represents a rise of ?21.6 million or 8.87 per cent in just two years.

Whilst the growth in Local Authority funding for Community Learning has been more modest, it has

grown from ?4.721 million to ?4.955 million between 2004 and 2006. This represents an increase of just under 5 per cent, which is broadly in line with inflation over that period.

The Welsh Assembly Government continually assesses the fitness for purpose of its funding and have recently carried out a Pause and Review of its funding to post sixteen (non HE) providers. As a consequence of this exercise, and the dialogue with community education providers, funding for Induction Units has been introduced. The Induction Unit particularly supports community learning provision by supporting the targeting, and engagement of learners.

Additionally, we are piloting funding approaches directly targeted at the needs of community education such as the Learning Community Accounts. Learning Community Accounts are currently being piloted through five diverse community projects across Wales. I believe that the work of the pilot projects will lead to an improved understanding of good practice within community learning and establish directly targeted and innovative approaches to this type of provision. The pilots are working with those most marginalised in our society and providing supportive environments in which to learn. This support leads to learners gaining qualifications and developing skills that enable them to deal more effectively with the challenges they face. I am pleased to report that the budget allocated to carrying out this pilot activity has risen from ?308,000.00 in 2005/06 for the first year of the pilot to ? 670,000.00 for this year 2006/07. The pilot phase is due to end in 2008.

We are also supporting partnership working between community learning providers. Through our planning mechanisms we are ensuring that partnerships between local authorities, colleges of further education, voluntary organisations and community groups effectively maximise impact by sharing resources, staff development, quality systems and establishing effective progression routes for learners.

In addition to my own portfolio, I am working closely with the Minister for Social Justice in responding to the need for Community Development Workers. Integral to this, and essential to future community development strategies, is the issue of community learning. We are establishing a Task and Finish Group to target community workforce training needs. This will identify both future needs and plan for the relevant training to meet it.

## **5. Children Act 2004 Commencement**

The Children Act 2004 gives effect to the Welsh Assembly Government's policy document "Children and Young People: Rights to Action" which sets out our proposals for Wales and our commitment to utilise the Act to develop more effective services for children in Wales. It provides for statutory co-operation between local authorities and their partners to improve the well-being of children and young people, on which I take the lead, and the establishment of Local Safeguarding Children Boards as part of the portfolio of the Minister for Health and Social Services. In addition it has provided for the transfer of CAFCASS (the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Services) functions to the National Assembly for Wales under the portfolio of the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration.

Commencement Orders and delegation motions have been approved by the Assembly during Plenary

debates between March 2005 and July 2006 and have provided for all but two of the relevant provisions of the Act to be commenced and delegated to the respective Ministers. A table outlining each of the provisions and their respective coming into force dates is at Annex C

One provision not yet commenced relates to section 29 of the Act which provides for the establishment and operation of database(s) of relevant information about children. The primary purpose of section 29 is to improve the welfare of children by facilitating contact between professionals across education, health, social care and youth offending who are supporting individual children or who have concerns about their development, well-being or welfare with the aim of securing early, coherent intervention. It would also help practitioners quickly identify the child and whether they are receiving the universal education and health services to which they are entitled. If it is to be effective, the information it contains needs to be valid and up to date. This function may be exercised by the Assembly, the Assembly may make arrangements for the establishment and operation of such a database or it may require local authorities to do so.

However, the current position on section 29 does not preclude local authorities from undertaking surveys to assess future demand for Welsh medium education, or indeed for agencies that could contribute to such work from sharing the necessary personal information, subject to obtaining the necessary consents.

The development of a Children's Information Database is a significant project that aims to draw upon existing data held across a number of agencies. As such we will need to provide robust reassurances to data controllers, to those upon whom data is held and those with parental responsibility for them that any information is obtained appropriately, held securely and used only for which they have provided their consent.

The Act prescribes that the database(s) may include relevant information including the child's name, address, gender, date of birth, a unique identifying number, the name and contact details of any person with parental authority, name and contact details of any educational institution providing education to them, the name and contact details of any person providing primary medical services to them, the name and contact details of any person providing services prescribed by the Assembly in regulations, information as to the existence of any cause for concern in relation to them and other information prescribed by the Assembly in regulations but excluding medical or other personal records.

The aim of such database(s) will be to assist practitioners quickly identify a child with whom they have contact and assess whether that child is receiving universal services of education and primary health care. It will enable practitioners to identify needs earlier and to take effective action to address those needs by providing a tool to indicate other agencies involved with the child. It will encourage better communication between practitioners by identifying where there is information to share and whether an assessment has taken place and what action has been taken.

This project is in its infancy and will take several years to develop, test and implement. It will involve considerable consultation and debate in respect of the secondary legislative framework underpinning this project as well as relevant training for those operating and accessing the system.

The development of a Children's Information Database is part of a co-ordinated approach to delivering the Welsh Assembly Government's agenda for children and young people. It forms an integral part of wider developments across children and young peoples' services, particularly the development of an electronic Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the Integrated Children System (ICS) and the Wales Accord on Sharing Personal Information. Both CAF and the ICS are likely to contain key data that could validate and update information held on a Children's Information Database.

I have agreed that a scoping study be undertaken to identify other potential sources of data and processes to ensure that practitioners can access current and relevant information. That scoping study will also look outside Wales to identify data management and information sharing solutions across the UK, including identifying how well and often data are managed and utilised to support the development of positive outcomes for children. The results of the scoping exercise will form an essential part of the evidence to determine the nature and extent of the development of any solution in Wales.

## **6. Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Change Plan Welsh Medium ITT Provision**

I reported to the Committee on 29 March 2006 about the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Furlong review of ITT provision in Wales. I said then that we intended to take forward changes in ITT provision via an ITT Change Plan, and set out a detailed short term change plan for work to be carried forward in 2006-07.

On Welsh medium ITT provision I said that we needed to develop clearer figures on the current and future demand for teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh. Our aim as a first step was for a specific review to be organised, charged with an examination of the future supply and demand issues for Welsh medium teachers and production of robust modelling methods to assist with better planning.

I am pleased to tell the Committee that a contract for conducting a review of these statistical planning issues underlying Welsh medium ITT course provision has been awarded to the consultancy firm London Economics. They have previously worked on Welsh medium provision issues in HE, have Welsh language capability and have an office in Wales in Cathedral Road, Cardiff.

The contract start date was 14 September 2006 and the firm are required to deliver a report by 15 March 2007 at the latest. A copy of the contract specification is attached at annex D.

## **7. Higher Education Issues**

Latest UCAS figures show that 20,524 applicants from across the UK have had their places successfully confirmed at a Welsh university or college in comparison with 20,841 at the same point last year - a fall of 1.5 per cent. At this stage acceptances have fallen for most student groups - accepted applicants to English institutions have fallen by 4.1 per cent.

However the figures suggest an increase in the proportion of Welsh students accepting places at Welsh institutions - in the context of an overall fall of 1.1 per cent in Welsh acceptances to institutions across the UK. Acceptances of Welsh students to Welsh institutions are up 8.6 per cent, whilst acceptances of Welsh students to English institutions have fallen by 16 per cent.

As a consequence 66 per cent of Welsh domiciles have been accepted at Welsh institutions compared with 61 per cent at this stage last year.

These figures need to be taken in context of a large increase in applications for entry in 2005, attributed in some part to the introduction of variable fees in England from 2006/07. (At this stage last year acceptances to Wales had increased by 5.2 per cent and applications to England by 9.3 per cent.)

Looking at the 2 year period as a whole, the number of applicants to Welsh institutions is 3.6 per cent higher than in 2004.

We must wait until the round of 'clearing' has been completed and students have accepted a place of study before we get a more meaningful picture for the 2006/07 cohort.

## **8. Teachers' Pay and Conditions**

The Welsh Assembly Government has submitted evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body to consider as part of the process for its next report on teachers' pay and conditions of service. These are not devolved issues: the Department for Education and Skills is responsible for teachers' pay and conditions of service in both Wales and England.

The STRB was given a remit letter on 17 May from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills detailing matters for examination and report. The STRB has been asked to make recommendations on:

- whether there are steps that should be taken to improve the use of current pay incentives and flexibilities to improve the recruitment, retention and quality of science and mathematics teachers;
- whether science teachers who are not physics and chemistry specialists should receive an incentive to encourage them to complete physics and chemistry continuing professional development enhancement, leading to an accredited qualification, to enable them to teach those subjects effectively;
- the extent to which SEN allowances fulfil an appropriate function in the teachers' pay and conditions system, whether they are used appropriately and whether there is overlap in theory or practice with other permitted payments, in preparation for further evidence in 2007 and possible change in 2008;
- what framework may be appropriate to enable relevant bodies to set a spot salary for Excellent Teachers within the ranges recommended by the STRB in its 15<sup>th</sup> Report; and whether, and if so, on what basis, the spot salary may be reviewed;
- whether, following the STRB's endorsement in its Fifteenth Report of the principle that part-time teachers should be treated equally with full-time teachers, it is now possible to move



towards a standardisation of approach to part-time teachers' pay and conditions within the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), in the light of possible solutions to be identified and presented to the STRB in evidence;

- with specific reference to the discussions and recommendation in the previous report, the extent to which there should be changes to the provisions of the STPCD to ensure the outcomes of performance management reviews provide the basis for decisions about pay progression, including evidence about the outcomes of CPD; and the extent to which provisions in England and Wales should be identical;
- given the independent educational developments and directions in England and Wales in the light of devolution, whether the STRB considers that it is appropriate for an identical approach to pay matters across both England and Wales to be maintained or whether a more flexible approach might be adopted. [The Secretary of State has indicated that this is a longer-term issue on which the STRB's initial views are sought.]

In February 2006, the Secretary of State accepted the STRB's recommendations in its Fifteenth Report in relation to teachers' professional responsibilities that consultees should consider the fundamental question of whether a description of teachers' professional role and responsibilities is needed (specifically whether it is needed in the STPCD), and present evidence to the STRB. Following this, the STRB issued a questionnaire to consultees in May 2006 to help consideration of this issue; matters raised in this were:-

- the usefulness of the descriptions of teachers' professional duties currently in the STPCD;
- what the descriptions of teachers' professional duties currently in the STPCD add to other descriptions of teachers' professional responsibilities, such as the GTCs' professional codes, pay standards in the STPCD or other professional standards (e.g. Induction);
- whether a description (or descriptions) of the professional roles and responsibilities of teachers in maintained schools in England and Wales is needed;
- if a description (or descriptions) is needed, what should be its core purpose; whether separate descriptions are needed for different categories of teacher; and whether descriptions need to be in the STPCD;
- what could be the consequences of not having any descriptions at all;
- how the arrangements for describing / prescribing teachers' professional roles and responsibilities in England and Wales (i.e. inclusion in the STPCD) compare with arrangements in other professions in the UK and for school teachers in other countries; and
- any evidence, for example academic studies, reports on practice in other professions and countries, statistics, relevant to these matters

The Department for Education and Skills does not now provide its own evidence; instead, evidence has been presented to the STRB by the members of the English Rewards and Incentives Group (RIG), which currently comprises ASCL, ATL, NASUWT, PAT, the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST), and DfES.

Attached are:-

- Annex E - the Welsh Assembly Government evidence on the pay and conditions remit items

- Annex F - the Welsh Assembly Government evidence on teachers' professional role and responsibilities
- Annex G - the evidence from RIG.

In addition to our written evidence, I also provided oral evidence to the STRB on 13 September 2006. A copy of the DfES remit letter and other information relating to the STRB can be found on the Teachernet site at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/payandperformance/pay/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/payandperformance/pay/)

## **9. World Skills Olympics**

In May it was announced that the UK has been successful in its bid to host the World Skills Competition in 2011.

Wales has been closely involved, along with the other devolved administrations, in this bidding process and have demonstrated our commitment to this bid by attending the launch event in Downing Street in January 2006, and by sending Mr Brian Connolly OBE, as our representative, to Melbourne as a part of the team that one this prestigious project for the UK.

We will be working closely with DfES and UK Skills to ensure this competition is a huge success and that we are able to incorporate the Welsh agenda into the event to show the world what we have to offer.

I recently met with Phil Hope MP to discuss the level and extent of Wales' involvement in World Skills 2011 and in the events that will be taking place in the run up to World Skills. This work has just started.

### **Background**

The World Skills Competition is held every two years in one of the 42 member countries. The competition is organised by the World Skills secretariat, and is open to young people up to the age of 22, who compete for Gold, Silver and Bronze medals, with Medallions of Excellence awarded to those achieving a defined world standard.

It is an event where young people are able to demonstrate their vocational skills in over 40 subject areas ranging from bakery, CNC miling, tiling, cabinet making, dressmaking, car painting to stonemasonry and compete to be the world champion in the 40 skill areas within the competition.

An example of the type of challenge a young person needs to demonstrate to become a world champion is demonstrated via the Agriculture Challenge. In this challenge young people are required to undertake:

- Sheep shearing (speed and finish)
- Welding (speed, finish and accuracy)
- Assessment of the fertility of one hundred gamebird eggs

The structure of local, regional, national and international skills competitions are a means of promoting excellence and getting young people interested and involved. The standards set at these events also provide a benchmark against which industry can measure and compare its performance with that of major overseas competitors and helps to raise the level of performance within the UK. They help motivate employees to achieve higher skill levels and enhance their career prospects, and challenge young people, teachers, trainers and employers to achieve world-class standards of competence in commerce, services and industry.

## **Next Steps**

Alongside World Skills and Skills Challenge is Skills City. This is a week long festival of vocational skills and is rotated around the UK. This event has not previously been hosted in Wales and my officials are considering whether there is an opportunity to bid to host this in 2008 or 2009 as part of the run up to 2011.

My officials are exploring a number of other options to gain added value from this event for Wales with colleagues from DfES, including:

- Promoting and running a number of Skills Challenge competitions in Wales over the next 5 years.
- Encouraging all providers and SSCs to participate in the Skills Challenge Events over the next 5 years.
- Hosting a number of Welsh themed events during World Skills 2011 in London.
- Developing and implement a 5 year skills promotional campaign during the lead up to World Skills on the back of the English campaign

This work has just started and a full business plan outlining the level of Wales' involvement in World Skills, the expected costs and benefits will be completed next year.

## **10. West Wales and the Valleys Convergence Programmes Consultation**

I wish to draw the Committee members attention to the current consultation on the West Wales and the Valleys Convergence programmes, which was launched by the First Minister on 28 July in Tredomen Business Park.

### **Consultation Content**

The consultation document details the vision, strategy and priorities for the economic, social and environmental regeneration of West Wales and the Valleys over the period 2007–2013 with the support of the European Structural Funds – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). The strategy is based on an analysis of the region's needs and aspirations, together with an assessment of the lessons learned under the current programmes. It has been developed in the context of the objectives of the European Union's Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas for sustainable economic reform and key Welsh Assembly Government national policies, including Wales: A Better Country, the Wales Spatial Plan, Wales: A Vibrant Economy, the Skills

and Employment Action Plan 2005, the Environment Strategy for Wales and Making the Connections.

In line with Wales: A Vibrant Economy, the European economic strategy, and the Lisbon strategy, the new programmes will have an even stronger focus on boosting growth and increasing numbers of jobs.

The priorities are:

#### ERDF

- Knowledge and innovation for growth;
- Creating an attractive business environment;
- Building sustainable communities;

#### ESF

- Increasing employment and tackling economic inactivity (ESF);
- Improving skill levels and improving the adaptability of the workforce (ESF);
- Making the Connections: modernising and improving the quality of our public services (ESF).

Under Priority 1 of the ESF programme in the Convergence region action will focus on increasing employment and promoting social inclusion by developing co-ordinated action to overcome barriers e. g. childcare, and disincentives to work, reducing the risk of people moving from work into unemployment and long term economic inactivity, promoting healthier lifestyles and equal opportunities.

Priority 2 will focus on modernising and developing the economy through development of the skills and adaptability of enterprises and workers, new entrants to the labour market, in particular young people, and those facing particular barriers or disadvantage. It will also focus on the transition from school to work, improving basic skills, address skills gaps and shortages and support progression in employment. We will be looking in particular at developing targeted interventions in schools to ensure young people are equipped to make a successful transition from school into sustainable employment.

Priority 3: Making the Connections will support targeted investments in public services in both the public and voluntary sectors, making services more accessible, coherent, effective and efficient, and responsive to the needs of individuals, businesses and communities. It will include support for developing the skills of public service managers, develop and expand electronic access, and improve dialogue and co-operation.

For the implementation of each priority, account will be taken of the need to address equal opportunities for all, and environmental sustainability.

## **Funding and Implementation**

Driving up levels of skills and increasing employment rates will be central to delivering sustainable economic improvements in West Wales and the Valleys. It is therefore proposed to increase the share of ESF funding in the new Convergence programmes to 40 percent, above its 35 percent share of the current Objective 1 programme.

We want to ensure that the new programmes have an even greater impact by adopting a more strategic approach to implementation, by streamlining arrangements and being more joined up. Our intention is to drive forward the new programmes through strategic frameworks, though there will still be some opportunity for the more familiar bidding arrangements and direct commissioning from WEFO. Organisations will need to bring forward robust ideas, in the context of strategic frameworks, that clearly illustrate how they will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Programmes, and to delivering activity that will also take forward the Lisbon agenda of economic growth and jobs.

The Convergence programmes for West Wales and the Valleys (ERDF and ESF) have been developed together, ensuring that the priorities will complement and add value to each other. This will facilitate flexibility between the funds, especially in the areas of innovation, skills, employment and sustainable communities. There will be also be increased opportunities to support innovative actions and trans-national co-operation projects.

## **Consultation Process**

The consultation period is open until close of play, Friday 06 October, and comments on the consultation document can be sent to WEFO Policy Branch by letter, e-mail or fax. All Assembly Members, and members of this committee were circulated a link to the electronic versions of the consultation document and supporting document and WEFO officials have subsequently circulated printed copies to all Assembly Members.

Four public consultation workshops have been arranged by WEFO. These events are scheduled for the 04, 11, 18 and 29 September. Partners are also arranging their own events and meetings, and officials are attending these where possible.

Following analysis of the consultation responses, the programmes will be formally submitted to the European Commission in the late autumn. The start date is subject to the successful negotiation of the programme with the European Commission over the winter, but we would anticipate reaching agreement in early 2007.