

Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee

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Date: 22 November 2006

Venue: Committee Room 3, the Senedd, National Assembly for Wales

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

1. Counselling

In response to the Clywch Inquiry and to take forward elements of the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to develop a national strategy for counselling in schools. An initial scoping exercise of current provision of counselling in Welsh schools was undertaken from November to December 2005 and this was presented to the ELLS Committee in March 2006 as part of my Report.

The Steering Group set-up to develop the strategy met for the first time on October 9th to discuss an initial draft of the strategy. Following that meeting further discussions have been held between officials from DELLS and the Department for Health and Social Services to agree how the strategy may best fit in with all relevant Assembly Government initiatives, including Everybody's Business and the NSF for Children and Young People. A meeting was also held with the Children's Commissioner for Wales to gauge how far the initial draft fitted in with his idea of what the strategy might contain.

The strategy is now being revised in light of the internal discussion and comments from the Children's Commissioner and will be presented to the Steering Group at its next meeting on December 19th. I will then be looking for the strategy to go out to consultation shortly afterwards and to provide the ELLS and HSS Committees with the opportunity to discuss it early in the New Year.

As well as the development of the strategy we have recently tendered a research contract to evaluate how current counselling provision in Wales ties in with current Welsh policies. The results of this research are anticipated in early summer and will inform our future approach.

2. Graham Review

The suggestion that the National Assembly for Wales should review the position of part-time students following the introduction of flexible tuition fees was a central recommendation of Professor Theresa

Rees' review of HE funding and student finance. Given the crucial importance of part-time study in Wales I was pleased to agree that recommendation. With the agreement of the other parties in the Assembly, the review group chaired by Dr Heather Graham began its work in July 2005. I was pleased to take delivery of the group's final report in June this year.

Following receipt of the final report my officials have been working with stakeholders and delivery partners to analyse the implications of its main recommendations. It bears repeating that the Report highlighted the complexity of the part-time higher education sector and that no simple solution could be offered that would readily address the needs of all part-time students. I was pleased that the report recognised the strengths of the current funding approach and that support for part-time study in Wales is already more generous than in the rest of the UK.

The central recommendation from the Graham review was that what they called "the combined" model of student support should be accepted as the preferred model in Wales. The essential characteristic of the group's preferred model is that part-time students should be supported through a combination of additional resources targeted at institutions alongside resources to support part-time study directed through Student Finance Wales. I am pleased to say that the Assembly Government accepts that central recommendation. We agree that the mixed approach provides the most effective way of supporting the very different patterns of part-time entry we have across Welsh HEIs. The Graham combined support model will also allow us to target the needs of our most disadvantaged students and maximise the flexibility available to us to deal with broader changes in the future.

I am also minded to agree the report's recommendation that further targeted support should be made available for particular categories of part time students and that we should build on the possibilities provided by the existing fee waiver scheme. My overriding concern in doing so will be the need to ensure consistency and simplicity. The world of student finance is becoming increasingly complex and we as a government are committed to developing it in a way that is as straightforward as possible for students to understand. The committee will appreciate that in bringing forward the government's final response I will also wish to have regard to the effectiveness of any new arrangements and their affordability.

Taking forward developments in part-time Higher Education will to some extent be a process rather than an event. It is still too soon to draw firm conclusions about the impact of variable fees in England this year and flexible fees in Wales next year. The areas investigated by the Graham report will need to be kept under careful review. We will, however, be bringing forward further details of the changes we want to introduce immediately in the New Year. This will follow further discussions with the HE sector.

The combined support model envisaged by Heather Graham places an important responsibility on institutions. It will be essential to develop absolute clarity around where their responsibilities end and the role of Student Finance Wales begins. I have asked officials to engage in further detailed discussions with the HE sector to obtain this clarity. Key points to be addressed in those discussions will be: the need for a support system which is easily understood and is straight-forward and cost-effective to administer; the need for a system which recognises the differing needs of different groups of students; the differing needs of HEIs in Wales; and the need to widen access to higher education

still further. I have also asked that these further discussions should explore how we might encourage the sector to work closely with employers and professional bodies across Wales.

We will also need to explore with the sector the detailed financial aspects of our support package - including the notional split of the additional £10.6 million we have made available and which is currently divided between the student finance budget (£6.5 million) and the HE Reaching Higher budget (£4.1 million).

I will report back to the committee on the outcome of these further discussions in the New Year.

3. Launch of The Learning Country: Vision into Action

I published *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* on 26 October. Copies were made available to Members.

Vision into Action represents the second stage in our Learning Country programme. The strategy sets out the Assembly Government's key objectives and the action that we will be taking over the next few years to deliver our vision for education, lifelong learning and skills in Wales. As ever, our plans are rooted firmly in the evidence and research base, which is presented clearly within the document itself.

Among our key proposals are:

- taking forward Flying Start and the Foundation Phase initiatives to ensure that every child in Wales has the best possible start in life;
- the development of six specialist regional centres for additional learning needs to be operational by next year;
- introducing revised curriculum and assessment arrangements from 2008;
- pressing ahead with the RAISE programme to improve outcomes for pupils in disadvantaged schools or who are looked after by local authorities;
- promoting a Welsh Language Sabbaticals scheme for primary and secondary school teachers and for FE practitioners. We will also consider its application to schools support staff, and the development of a similar scheme for Foundation Phase practitioners;
- rolling out the Welsh Baccalaureate at Advanced and Intermediate levels in post-16 education and piloting a Foundation level model;
- developing a five-year strategic plan, based on our pedagogy initiative, to help practitioners engage in the most effective learning and teaching, supported by cutting-edge research in this area;
- a comprehensive review of the mission and purpose of further education;
- enhancing opportunities for studying part-time higher education in higher education and the support provided to part-time students in response to the Graham review.

Copies of *Vision into Action* are being sent to all key stakeholders, including schools, colleges and universities, local authorities, trades unions, the business and voluntary sectors.

4. The Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales

The Learning Country-Vision into Action proposed the need for a thoroughgoing policy review of the mission, and purpose of the Further Education (FE) sector in Wales. It identified the need to give consideration to the extent to which colleges should specialise, the diverse nature of the sector, focus on employability skills and increase responsiveness to learners.

The review will be holistic and incorporate an analysis not just of Further Education Institutions, but an evaluation of the wider role of the sector in relation to post sixteen developments, 14-19 learning Pathways, higher education, workplace learning, and the Leitch review.

As identified in Vision Into Action, the review will consider the extent to which FE institutions should focus on economically useful skills; the extent to which they should specialise; efforts to improve quality; the place of self regulation and other measures to streamline governance; the diverse nature of the sector; workforce development initiatives; and how best to monitor the views of students on a regular basis and to publish the results.

Terms of Reference for the Review of Further Education Sector in Wales – Context and rationale:

In line with the commitment made in the ‘The Learning Country-Vision into Action’, the Welsh Assembly Government is establishing an independent review to evaluate the strategic mission and role of the Further Education sector in the delivery of education, lifelong learning and skills in Wales.

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The review will be holistic and incorporate an analysis not just of Further Education Institutions, but an evaluation of the wider role of the sector in relation to developments in 14-19 education and training, higher education, the Leitch Review on skills, workplace and adult learning.

Remit:

Within this context the review will consider the extent to which the mission and business objectives of further education providers is clear in purpose, focused and appropriate for the environment in which they operate. Specifically the review will focus on the following:

- the functions currently exercised by publicly funded bodies in respect of further education and training;
- the efficacy and cost effectiveness of these functions;
- what functions and priorities should be exercised in the future and the priority placed on them;
- the mechanisms for how these functions should be discharged; and
- the development of the workforce.

In considering these areas the following will need to be investigated:

- comparative European and international analysis, particularly relating to strategies surrounding the delivery of skills;
- the funding methodology for establishing effective collaboration in education and training;
- the present and future role of the sector in the delivery of economic skills and workforce development, including opportunities for specialisation at national and regional level;
- the training and professional development of the workforce, including the case for setting up a workforce professional body;
- the present and future contribution of the sector to tackling disadvantage, economic inactivity and widening participation including adult and community learning;
- the role of the sector in delivery of higher education, including the establishment of schools/ further and higher education consortia;
- methods of ensuring that the experience and views of learners in the sector contribute to the assessment of quality and continued improvement;
- governance, self regulation and management of FEIs;
- strategies for ensuring managerial and teaching competencies are relevant to need; and
- the role and contribution of the sector to the development and delivery of Welsh medium and bilingual learning opportunities and Welsh language skills.

The Review will need to be mindful of the key principles of equality of opportunity; support for the Assembly's policies on race equality, disability and promoting bilingualism; sustainable development; and social justice.

The Review will begin its work this autumn and it is my intention to provide a detailed presentation of the work of the Review's progress and analysis at the January meeting of the ELLS Committee.

The Review be carried out by an independent panel of three/four experts utilising the further expertise of a wider reference group consisting of six key stakeholders representing a wide range of expertise reflecting schools, FEI, employer, voluntary and higher education sectors. The panel and reference group will consult and take evidence from a wide range of relevant stakeholders and interested parties.

In relation to the Chair of the Independent Panel, relevant high level experience, understanding and knowledge of the post sixteen sector will be the competencies required together with proven expertise in the setting of national strategic policy. The Chair will also need to be independent from any sectoral interest.

The legislative programme announced in the Queen's speech includes the Further Education and Training Bill. This Bill contains provision for the Welsh Assembly to introduce Assembly Measures relating to the delivery and efficiency of further education. They will particularly allow the key further education objectives identified in Wales' recently published strategic policy document: "The Learning Country – Vision into Action" to be implemented. The powers will provide the necessary authority and mechanisms for the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that the outcomes of the

review of further education is supported and guided to meet the future economic, social and learner needs of Wales.

5. Consultation on School Transport

I am pleased to tell you that the Welsh Assembly Government has begun a consultation exercise on draft home to school transport guidance. The draft guidance sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's expectations of LEAs for the provision and maintenance of a high quality, safe and effective transport service for pupils up to year 11. It also comments on the discretionary arrangements that LEAs may make, and the publication of information by LEAs for users. It is targeted at LEAs, but will also be of interest to schools, transport operators, parents and interest groups.

The draft guidance responds to the review of home to school transport by the then Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, which included two specific recommendations requiring guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government about the clarification of legal responsibilities and codes of conduct for behaviour.

Consultees have been invited to comment on the draft guidance using a questionnaire. The draft guidance and the questionnaire are available on the Welsh Assembly Government's website in both Welsh and English. I will welcome feedback from a range of interests. The consultation period ends in February. After that my officials will evaluate the responses before producing final guidance for my approval. In line with Assembly Government practice, consultation responses will be collated and an anonymised summary published.

I share the Committee's interest in home to school transport and commitment to improve arrangements. We will have an opportunity to consider the issues in more detail in February when the Committee is scheduled to scrutinise progress of its home to school transport review. Members will also recall that many of the recommendations of the Committee policy review fell to local authorities. With that in mind, I would recommend that the Committee also invite the WLGA to provide an update.

6. Learning Coaches

The Learning Coach role is key to supporting the learner in the learning related aspects of the whole Learning Pathway with a focus on maximising the young person's ability to learn.

The 14-19 Learning Pathways framework has been developed from the best of what we know works for young people, the experience and expertise of practitioners throughout Wales and from what young people say works for them.

The Learning Coach role has also been developed from best practice in learning support for learners of all abilities, and again from what young people find most effective in supporting their learning.

The whole 14-19 Learning Pathways framework, and the wider role encapsulated in the expectations

of the Learning Coach add up to a new package which will transform 14-19 provision in Wales over the next few years.

All potential Learning Coaches will bring experience in some, and often many, of the competences. Our vision for the role is that learners receive enhanced support directly related to the development of their individual learning pathway. The new Learning Pathways framework and the new role of Learning Coach have led to a fresh look at support for learning in all settings.

One of the most significant aspects of the Learning Coach role is the range of professions involved in providing learning support. Teachers and lecturers, youth workers, careers advisers and learning assistants bring a rich variety of experience and perspectives to the role. The range of participants currently coming together through the training programme is essential to building the Learning Coach role as one of the key ingredients of the 14-19 Learning Pathways framework.

This rich seam of experience will support the development of expert reflective Learning Coaches supporting 14-19 learners in the exciting new environment.

There are now 240 Learning Coaches being trained under the pilot programme in Wales. This programme is being delivered by First Campus, led by the University of Glamorgan.

In summer 2005, 5 Core Units were developed providing a total of 50 Credits. Participants will receive a formal certificate recognising their achievement of 50 credits and their status as Accredited Learning Coach. First Campus also developed units and embarked on a wide programme of consultation across Wales during the period of development.

After the pilot phase accredited Learning Coaches will then have the opportunity to pursue optional additional units of study to accumulate 120 level 4 credits required for the award of a University Certificate in Higher Education.

7. Respecting Others Week 20-24 November

I recognise that bullying takes place in all schools to some degree and there will always be a small number of young people who wish to victimise or bully another individual, for whatever reason. That is why the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to working with pupils, schools, LEAs and other partners across Wales to tackle bullying.

Following on from the success of last year the Welsh Assembly Government is once again holding an anti-bullying week, w/c 20-24 November.

This year we have arranged for our week to run at the same time as England's Anti-Bullying week to ensure that we have a more co-ordinated approach and make the most of the media attention nationally. Assembly Government officials have been working with colleagues in the Anti-Bullying Alliance in England to achieve this aim.

The joint theme this year is 'bystanders'. Bystanders are those people that know that incidents of

bullying take place but don't do anything to help the victim. We need to encourage these individuals to step forward and recognise that they have a responsibility to the victims and that we can all work together to tackle bullying.

Briefing for schools

The Anti-Bullying Alliance in England produced 3 papers to distribute to schools in England:

- Bullying: The facts – briefing on bullying generally
- 'Bystanders' and bullying: A summary of Research
- Ideas for schools on things to do during Respecting Others week

The Anti-Bullying Alliance kindly agreed for these materials to be circulated to schools in Wales, after being updated to reflect the Welsh context and translated. The information was produced on CD and issued to all schools on 20 October and will also be made available on our website. Also included on the CD were copies of the Assembly Government 'Respecting others: Anti-Bullying Guidance' Circular and the Cardiff University Report on the 'Evaluation of Anti-Bullying Policies in Schools in Wales'.

Respecting Others website

Assembly officials have set up a website specifically for Respecting Others week (www.wales.gov.uk/respectingothers). The website provides various information, including:

- Publications i.e. Respecting others Guidance, Estyn Report on Good Practice and Cardiff University's Report on Evaluation of Anti-bullying policies.
- Events page of planned activities for both schools and LEAs.
- Winning entries of the posters and classroom charters competition - for downloading and displaying around the school.
- Information about the Anti-Bullying Network and links to members websites.
- An information resource for teachers, parents, pupils etc. providing links to useful documents/leaflets/advice.
- Briefing pack provided to schools on bullying and bystanders and the ideas for schools.

School Proforma

Schools have been provided with a proforma to complete and submit to Assembly Government officials to let us know what activities they have planned for the week. This information will be posted on the website.

To date, activities include:

- Theatre Productions
- Pupil presentations

- PSE lessons focused on bullying
- Circle time activities about bullying
- Creating a 'bullying tree'
- Proposed local radio item involving youth council representative and community support officer;
- launch anti-bullying posters;
- launch of information leaflets
- LEA consultation on guidance to schools on anti-bullying policies.
- purchasing the anti-bullying lanyards;
- Early Years children to learn a 'Helping Song'
- Role Play
- Poem on 'Fear'

Lanyards

After the success of the wrist bands during Anti-Bullying Week 2005, the Anti-Bullying Alliance in England have produced blue lanyards this year. They can be attached to pencil cases, bags, jackets etc. Schools in Wales have been encouraged to place orders directly with the Anti-Bullying Alliance. The lanyards can then be distributed to the pupils during the week.

8. National Behaviour and Attendance Review

In March I made a commitment to undertake a review of behaviour and attendance to support existing activity and to shape and develop the future approach to these challenging issues, and to fully involve the Committee in this exciting policy development.

I am delighted to be able to announce today that Professor Ken Reid, Vice Principal of Swansea Institute of Higher Education, will chair the Steering Group tasked with taking forward the National Review of Attendance and Behaviour. He will be joined by representatives from Estyn, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and key stakeholder groups including serving practitioners from pupil referral units, primary and secondary schools, behaviour support services, education welfare services and inclusion services within local authorities, voluntary organisations and parenting groups.

The group membership was taken from a pool of nominations which was received after an invitation to participate in the review was issued widely across Wales. I was delighted by the fantastic response rate which ensured that we had a wide range of strong nominations to consider for each stakeholder area, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to participate in this process for their interest and enthusiasm in the work we are undertaking.

The remit of the group has been informed by the outcome of a consultation event held on 26th June 2006, which was used to initiate debate with key stakeholders around the issues of attendance and behaviour in Wales. This included teachers, parents, children and young people, voluntary organisations and representatives from local authorities. Representatives were invited to present and discuss their views on attendance and behaviour, to share good practice they have encountered and recommend elements to be included in the remit of the review.

The proposed remit includes actions to:

- Identify effective practice in promoting positive behaviour and attendance and ways in which this practice could be disseminated and embedded in schools and local authorities across Wales.
- Identify effective use of multi-agency partnerships in tackling issues of poor attendance and behaviour, including consideration of regional models.
- Explore ways in which parents, children and young people and the community as a whole can be more effectively supported and engaged in the promotion of positive behaviour and attendance.
- Identify potential applications of the framework powers within the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that would assist in promoting discipline and attendance, including specific consideration of the provision of education for excluded pupils.

The consultation event also identified the following areas where they believed a real difference could be made, and that should be looked at during the course of the review:

- Teaching and Learning – flexibility and relevance of curriculum, life skills, learning styles
- Staff development and support – ITT and induction, training for non teaching staff, specialist training in learning difficulties, developing teacher/parent relationships
- School organisation and facilities – school size, ethos, community engagement, development of inclusive schools
- Pupil Movement – transition, transfer, reintegration, transient populations
- Support for children and young people – vulnerable groups, e.g. young carers, pastoral support programmes, access to mental health support, signposting
- Parents and home life – parental engagement, bridge between home and school, availability of support
- Working in partnership – consistency of approach, genuine partnership working, regional approaches to provision, information sharing
- Funding – long term view vs. pilot approach, clarity around sources of funding, targeting
- Alternative Provision – referral routes, amount and quality of available provision, cost
- Exclusion – alternatives, ‘voluntary’ withdrawals, SEN links, options for permanently excluded pupils, 25 hours provision

Both the remit and areas for investigation are draft and will be finalised following the first meeting of the Steering Group on 7th December. As such I would welcome any comments you may have.

9. Education and Inspections Act 2006

I am pleased to report that the Education and Inspections Act 2006 received Royal Assent on 8 November 2006. The Bill had a high profile passage through Parliament and provisions for schools in England attracted much media interest.

The Act’s primary purpose is to further UK Government policy for schools in England with the dual

objectives of encouraging schools to specialise and the creation of greater diversity in school organisation with emphasis on more schools becoming foundation schools backed by charitable foundations ('Trust schools'). Committee members will recall that the Welsh Assembly Government did not adopt this policy because I am committed to raising standards by improving outcomes for pupils in all schools.

The Act includes legislation for Wales in important policy areas. Where policy in England and Wales is similar, and the changes sought were desirable for Wales, Wales was included in clauses with England set out on the face of the Bill. Where there was no need for change in Wales, or the changes proposed for England were not appropriate for Wales, existing legislation will continue to apply. The Act strengthens the law for school admissions requiring admissions authorities to act in accordance with the admissions code. Important provisions for Wales were also made for food and drink in schools, behaviour, discipline and exclusion, collaboration amongst schools and FE institutions, and innovation in schools.

Most significant of all, the Act includes the first framework powers for education legislation. After the May 2007 elections the National Assembly will be able to make Welsh laws for significant parts of the education statute book namely: school organisation; admission; the curriculum; entitlement and services for learners; attendance, discipline and exclusion; travel for learners; and food and drink in schools.

The National Assembly will be able to commence most Welsh provisions in the Act at a time of its choice. Use of the framework power requires conversion to Assembly Measures and for the Government of Wales Act 2006 changes to take place. Consideration of which provisions should be used first, and the timing of commencement of provisions, will be a matter for DELLS business planning for 2007 onwards.

10. I-NET International Conference on Leadership for Sustainable Innovation in Boston (USA)

Wales has been at the forefront of assessment change as far as both the UK and the wider educational community is concerned.

That is why I was asked to speak at the prestigious I-NET International Conference on Leadership for Sustainable Innovation in Boston (USA) which was held at the end of last week on the theme of effective assessment and links to the curriculum. The conference was held in partnership between INET, Boston College (one of America's top teacher training universities) and Boston Public Schools (the winner of the Broad Prize as the most successful and innovative school district in America.)

The speakers were a mixture of academics, practitioners and policymakers, locally, nationally and from around the world. Participants were from 12 countries but mostly from the UK, the US, Australia and Canada.

One purpose of the conference was to make participants aware of the alternative paths to education systems reform – like high achieving Finland which has no testing, Wales which has effectively

abolished it, England which is trying to reconcile SATs with innovation and Ontario where tested literacy requirements are increasing alongside capacity building rather than a punitive strategy for improvement.

I was asked to describe in my speech what it is like having a system that now has little or no testing before the age of 14, why did this come about and what was it a response to, how are the schools faring, what is emerging in schools in Wales in learning, teaching and leadership as a result of the end of testing and what does the future hold.

I joined a platform of speakers from Harvard, Boston College and a Finnish representative from the World Bank.

During my short stay in Boston I also visited several educational establishments in and around Boston to speak to education professionals and academics to gain an insight into the educational system in America.

One of the areas which I specifically showcased in my speech was the innovative work which has taken place in Wales which is leading to the replacement of statutory tests by moderated statutory teacher assessment. The timing of the event in Boston was opportune in that it took place during the same week that the consultation began on the final piece of the jigsaw in terms of replacing SATs at Key Stage 2 and 3 in Wales.

In my speech I looked back on how assessment was, until very recently, undertaken in Wales, the findings of the independent Daugherty Review and the National Curriculum and linked assessment arrangements review, why we have moved away from a previous dependency on testing and where we are now i.e. we have phased out statutory tests for 7, 11 and 14 year olds and we are developing new arrangements to support schools in quality assuring their teacher assessment at both Key Stages 2 and 3.

What we are doing on assessment is part of a much wider picture on how we develop an education system which is fit for purpose now and can adapt to changing needs of the future.

My participation at the conference in Boston reiterated the fact that we cannot be a learning country unless we can measure ourselves against others which is why Wales is now participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The alacrity with which schools in Wales have responded to this challenge demonstrates that there is real appetite out there for us to test ourselves internationally – and to show the world what we are doing.