

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Date:	19 January 2005
Time:	9.00am
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. ACCAC and ELWa Merger: Progress Report

Following the announcement of the mergers of ELWa, WDA and WTB with the Assembly Government last summer a team was established, comprised of officials from each of the bodies to be merged, together with representatives of staff Trades Unions, to outline organisational, operating and implementing arrangements for the mergers. The Assembly Government is publishing a consultation document later this month that draws on this work. The Chairs of WDA, WTB and ELWa will have had the opportunity to comment on the final draft of this prior to issue; a meeting of relevant Ministers and Chairs is planned for 17 January. I am planning to meet a number of external stakeholders during the consultation period and would welcome the comments of the committee on the proposals put forward.

The crucial factor influencing our decision to also merge ACCAC with the Assembly is the scale of the transformation that we are seeking to achieve for education and training in Wales, as outlined in *The Learning Country and Wales: A Better Country*. Our agenda will effect all aspects of learning delivery; the foundation phase, a revised school curriculum, new assessment arrangements, better transition from primary to secondary, Learning Pathways 14-19, the review of vocational qualifications and the development of creditisation to embrace vocational, informal and non-formal learning, parity of esteem, the development and implementation of the Welsh Bac, and modernisation of the examination system. At the same time developments elsewhere, not least the post-Tomlinson agenda and their possible implications for us, have to be taken into account. It is our judgement, given the fundamental and far-reaching nature of these changes, that we need to establish and build on a critical mass of capacity. We believe this is achievable only by merging the strengths and expertise of ACCAC with the existing DfTE, together with ELWa to form a new Department for Education and Lifelong Learning (DELL)

It is my hope that ACCAC will be able to merge with the Assembly at the same time as ELWa, so that a balanced and integrated Department can be created in April 2006. Work will proceed on the basis that it can be achieved though we will need to keep this matter under review as our merger work unfolds. John

Valentine Williams, the Chief Executive of ACCAC, and Elizabeth Raikes, the Chief Executive of ELWa, will be members of the Transition Project Steering Group set up under Richard Davies' chairmanship to ensure the process of creating the new DELL is managed effectively.

2. GTCW Teacher and Recruitment Action Plan: Progress Report

The attached note at annex B gives information on the main teacher recruitment issues in Wales. It covers those issues where the Welsh Assembly Government has direct responsibilities.

The note covers areas with a direct bearing on teacher recruitment and retention, apart from teachers' pay and conditions, which are not devolved. There are numerous other factors which have a less direct relationship with teacher recruitment and retention. These include supporting reductions in teachers' workload (for which the local government settlement for councils for 2005-06 includes a further £25 million to implement the second phase of the Teachers' Workload Agreement, including provision for support staff training, in addition to the £33 million introduced in 2004-05); the Induction and early professional development arrangements for supporting newly qualified teachers in their first years in teaching; support for continuing professional development; and our work on reducing pupil disaffection. These measures will all help to improve teacher retention in particular but are too extensive to be covered sensibly in the attached note.

The note also covers matters in these areas raised by the General Teaching Council for Wales in its presentation on teacher recruitment and retention issues (following the publication of its Action Plan) to Committee on 7 July. For this purpose I have indicated at the end of each section where appropriate where aspects of the areas covered were highlighted by the GTCW.

I propose to provide further reports to the Committee on individual topics as and when there is significant information (for example, when the tender exercise on the review of initial teacher training provision is completed).

A range of statistical information related to teacher recruitment in Wales is attached at annex C. This data includes some new material on applications for posts and retention; in conjunction with the General Teaching Council for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government has adopted a number of the questions previously used in the Council's recruitment surveys for incorporation in the schools census.

3. Accreditation of New Qualifications

Learners and employers need to be assured that qualifications are fit for purpose, command confidence and are understood by everyone involved. It is also important that consistent standards are properly maintained across awarding bodies over time, that the awarding body offering a qualification is competent, and that if something goes wrong there is a right of appeal.

Accreditation of qualifications, and post-accreditation monitoring by the regulatory authorities - the

Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) - are the processes by which these standards are maintained. External qualifications that meet – and continue to meet – the accreditation criteria are accredited into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which aims to:

- enable learners, providers, employers and users of qualifications to understand the range of qualifications available
- show how different types of qualifications relate to each other and to promote and support informed choices and progression opportunities
- help learners of all ages and circumstances to make informed decisions on selecting the qualification(s) that best meet their needs.

The NQF contains all qualifications accredited by the regulatory authorities.

Meeting the criteria

The Accreditation process has recently been revised to:

- minimise the duplication of information required from awarding bodies
- reduce the time taken for the accreditation of qualifications.

The process has 2 elements. First an organisation that wishes to have a qualification admitted to the NQF must be recognised as an awarding body. Only those organisations which have been 'recognised' by the regulatory authorities as awarding bodies are able to submit qualifications for inclusion in the NQF. It is important that awarding bodies are robust organisations, with appropriate structures and systems in place to ensure that qualifications themselves are robust and reliable.

Before an individual qualification is admitted to the NQF, the regulatory authorities must be satisfied that it meets agreed criteria laid down by the regulatory authorities. Again it is important to ensure that qualifications meet the required standards. It is in the interest of candidates that this is the case, so that their achievements can be properly recognised.

Details of the regulatory criteria can be found in the document 'The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)' which is produced by the regulatory authorities and is available from the ACCAC website - www.accac.org.uk .

4. Widening Participation in Further Education: Progress Report

Statistical Data

ELWa and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales published statistics on further and higher education in Wales in December 2004. This is available from the ELWa website (http://www.elwa.org.uk/elwaweb/doc_bin/Research%20Reports/HE_FE_training_statistics_wales_2002_03.pdf).

The data in the publication shows:

- Between 2000/01 and 2002/03 the number of further education students at Further Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions in Wales increased by 7 per cent from 165,000 to 176,000.
- The number of part-time students has increased by 10 per cent while the number of full-time students has decreased by 2 per cent.
- Between 2000/01 and 2002/03 the number of students from deprived electoral wards (wards that qualify for the widening participation factor in funding), has increased by 15 per cent.

EMA: Following the formalisation of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Wales scheme in November, schools and colleges were able to begin entering attendance data onto the secure EMA Wales website and to conclude Part One Learning Agreements with their students. The first payments - back-dated where appropriate - were made by the scheme administrators, the Student Loans Company (SLC), to eligible students on 7th December.

Indications from the SLCs management information suggest that some 13,000 16 year-old students have applied for an EMA with approximately 10,000 of these currently receiving an allowance. The majority of those, some 75 per cent, are receiving the maximum £30 per week.

ALG: 5,800 FE students benefited from an Assembly Learning Grant in 2003/04 compared to around 4,500 in the first year of the scheme. 80 per cent of full-time students and 70 per cent of part-time students had a residual income of £5,115 or less and thus benefited from a full ALG. (£1500)

5. Business Planning for Post-2006 Higher Education Funding

Rees Review

An independent study group, chaired by Professor Teresa Rees, has been asked to advise the Assembly Government on student support and HE finance, including, whether variable fees should be introduced in Wales from 2007/08 onwards. The Rees Review group will submit an interim report to the Assembly

Government and a final report by April 2005 based on all evidence. The Interim Report is scheduled to come to ELL committee on 9 March.

The Rees review group has met five times since the Higher Education Act 2004 received Royal Assent in July. The next meeting is on 19th and 20th January.

In November last year, Professor Teresa Rees wrote to over 200 key stakeholders inviting them to submit evidence, comments and views to the review group. The study group has so far received over 40 responses, all of which are being considered in detail. In addition to the consultation exercise with stakeholders, a number of research and discussion seminars have been arranged to inform the group's work.

Providing a bilingual student support system - Task and Finish Group

With the devolution of student support to Wales work is in hand to deliver a bilingual service

The work of the 'Providing a Bilingual Student Support System' Task & Finish Group has now ended. The Group's recommendations have been presented to me, and I am content that they define a clear picture of what a full bilingual student support system for Wales should look like. The Group's recommendations have been endorsed by the Welsh Language Board, and have been warmly received by the Assembly's own Welsh Language Unit.

The Welsh Language Board is currently undertaking a separate study into the readiness of Welsh LEAs to provide a fully bilingual student support service in AY 06/07. The Welsh Language Board are working with our partners in the Department of Education and Skills and the SLC to see what service improvements can be made ahead of AY 2006/07.

6. School of the Future

In June 2003 I made a statement to Plenary in response to the recommendations in the ELL Committee's Interim Report on the 'School of the Future'.

The second of the report's recommendations was that I should report to the Committee setting out a programme for managing the substantial changes required for taking forward the 'School of the Future' agenda. In my statement I said that I envisaged my report would focus on:

- extension of Early Years provision
- development of the Foundation Phase ages 3-7
- review of assessment arrangements at KS2 and KS3

- transition from primary to secondary school
- under-performance at KS3
- Learning Pathways 14-19
- Welsh Baccalaureate
- Iaith Pawb
- development of SEN including regional provision
- attendance and more flexible provision for disaffected pupils
- reducing teacher workloads and bureaucratic burdens on schools
- use of IT for teaching and learning
- Continuing Professional Development for teachers
- Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools
- a voice for pupils in school provision
- school buildings which are accessible to all and incorporate principles of sustainability.

I am therefore now reporting to the Committee what has been achieved in taking forward the 'School of the Future' agenda in relation to these issues since my Statement.

Early Years

Working with LEAs and their Early Years Development and Childcare partnership over the last three years, the Welsh Assembly Government has invested almost £39m and created an additional 11,000 places through a mixed economy provision with the voluntary sector playing an equal part. Integrated Centres are operational in Rhondda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly, Conwy, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys with several others opening before the end of the current financial year.

We have made a further commitment of almost £23m for 2005-06 to sustain the current level of provision and enhance the Integrated Centre programme.

In 2006/07 and 2007/08 a total of £50 million has been allocated for Early Years and the continued development of Integrated Centres, based mainly around primary schools. This will build on their traditional role at the centre of the community.

Foundation Phase

In September 2004 the Foundation Phase was piloted in 41 settings, including 22 schools, across Wales. ACCAC has produced a draft Framework for Children's Learning which is being used by pilot settings to guide their planning and practice. ACCAC is also producing guidance documents that will help settings to implement the new Framework.

The pilot schools have been given sufficient funding to provide a ratio of 1 adult to 8 children. This brings them in line with the voluntary/private sector which, under the Care Standards for Wales guidelines, currently have to provide a 1:8 ratio.

All aspects of the Foundation Phase will be closely monitored and evaluated to assess the impact of the changes on the education of our youngest children. The full roll out of the Foundation Phase is scheduled to start in September 2006 and to be completed by September 2008 for all schools and funded settings providing education to 3-7 year olds.

Review of Assessment Arrangements at KS2 and KS3

I reported to the Committee on 10 November on the positive response to the consultation on the National Curriculum Assessment Arrangements for 11- and 14-year-olds. Amendment of the Key Stage 2 regulations to facilitate change was approved by the Assembly on 9 November. A full report on the consultation exercise will be published on the Internet later this month.

Schools have already been told about the 2005 assessment arrangements. In particular, the Key Stage 2 tests will be optional for 2005. A free optional external marking service has been made available to all schools that decide to use the optional test materials.

Key Stage 3 tests will remain statutory for 2005. Amendments to the Key Stage 3 regulations removing the statutory basis of the tests from 2006 will be brought before the Assembly during the summer term.

I have asked ACCAC to work out details of the Year 5 skills tests and teacher moderation arrangements. When completed, these will be the subject of a further consultation exercise.

Transition from Primary to Secondary School

We know that good progress at Key Stage 3 can be influenced by effective transition arrangements for pupils moving from primary to secondary school. A number of measures have therefore been taken to secure a specific emphasis on curriculum planning so that schemes of work build on what has been

taught previously and provide continuity in teaching and learning. Action to date includes publication by Estyn of guidance on how primary and secondary schools and LEAs can work together to improve transition, identification of transition as one of the priority areas for support from the Better Schools Fund and provision of additional INSET days for transition planning.

On 25 November I attended a national conference hosted by ACCAC to launch further guidance and support. This included guidance for schools on the use of Bridging Units. In addition, ACCAC in partnership with BBC Wales, has provided all schools with examples of good practice in managing transition based on filmed case studies and interviews with practitioners for across Wales.

The conference was also used to launch a consultation paper setting out proposals to require the governing bodies of maintained secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, jointly, to draw up Transition Plans. Responses have been requested by 25 February 2005.

Under-Performance at KS3

In The Learning Country I set out my commitment to tackle under-performance at Key Stage 3 and ensure that there is continuity and progression for all pupils moving from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. To address this I have asked ACCAC, Estyn and the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) to provide a rolling programme of support (Aiming for Excellence) for schools and LEAs. This has included the publication of guidance on raising standards in literacy, numeracy, and ICT across the curriculum at Key Stage 3. The programme is supported by the Better Schools Fund and is also being assisted by initiatives and funds directed at secondary schools by the Basic Skills Agency as part of their implementation of the all-age Basic Skills Strategy for Wales.

Learning Pathways 14-19

I have made regular reports to the Assembly on progress in developing and implementing Learning Pathways 14-19.

Since the publication of the Action Plan in April 2003, we have moved quickly, carefully and collaboratively to produce the Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance. The guidance was officially launched in September 2004 and will be updated as Learning Pathways 14-19 rolls out in the coming years. The initiative is closely linked to the development of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

14-19 Networks, responsible for the planning and delivery of Learning Pathways, have been established in each local authority area. £1.1 million has been secured to support their development in 2004-05. A further £240,000 has been secured to fund pilots in the key areas of: Learning Coach; Personal Support; Work Focused Experience; and Community Participation. The results of the pilots will be evaluated and fed into the revised guidance in Summer 2005. The outcome of the Learning Coach pilots will also inform the development of bespoke training materials and the introduction of a level 3 qualification.

Welsh Bacalaureate

Since my statement on 25 June 2003 I have made regular reports to the Assembly on progress on the Welsh Bacalaureate pilot. The first cohort of Welsh Bac students commenced their studies in September 2003. Later that month UCAS announced its decision to award 120 tariff points to the Welsh Bacalaureate Qualification Core Certificate at Advanced Level - a real boost for the existing students and the second cohort that began their studies in September 2004. On 7 July 2004 I reported to ELL Committee on the 7 school and colleges that will form the 3rd cohort of pilot centres. These 7 centres will begin the delivery of the Welsh Bac in September 2005. I can confirm that the recently agreed Assembly budget will enable development of a Foundation Level Welsh Bac in 2005, in line with our commitment in Wales A Better Country. This will further enhance the attraction of the Welsh Bac. An additional £200,000 in 2005-06, £1 million in 2006-07 and £1.5 million in 2007-08 will be available to support the development of the Welsh Bac as we move towards national roll-out, which, subject to evaluation, will be from September 2007.

Mike Tomlinson's Group looking at 14-19 reform in England published its final report on 18 October 2004. As anticipated, the report recommends many developments similar to those we already have in hand in Wales. I have spoken with DfES Ministers and have agreed that there will be close working at all levels as work stemming from the report is taken forward. The DfES detailed response to the report will be in a White Paper in the Spring. I am confident that the close working will ensure compatibility between developments in England and Wales.

Iaith Pawb

I highlighted the achievements within my portfolio in relation to Iaith Pawb in my report to the Committee on 24 September 2004. In September I reported that I had made an additional £400,000 available to ACCAC to support their work on commissioning of Welsh and bilingual classroom materials and qualifications through the medium of Welsh, this has now been increased to £500,000. This will enable all primary schools to obtain, free of charge, additional Welsh medium and bilingual classroom materials. Details of how schools can obtain the materials will be announced shortly.

Iaith Pawb commits the Welsh Assembly Government in 2005-06 to introducing a pilot programme of intensive Welsh Language training for qualified teachers by offering immersion learning in sabbaticals. A similar commitment is also made in respect of the post-16 sector to maximise the numbers of practitioners teaching through the medium of Welsh.

Officials have been working to identify possible providers for the training programme and held meetings with various partner organisations to discuss possible joint-working arrangements. Discussions with ELWa have concluded that the proposed schemes for schoolteachers and post-16 practitioners can be combined.

We therefore intend working closely with ELWa to develop and pilot a single training programme for

school teachers and FE practitioners with the benefits of reducing costs and securing a uniform standard of provision between the school and post-16 sectors.

ELWa has already made significant progress in developing a pilot training programme in language skills and bilingual methodology for post-16 practitioners and we now plan to extend this programme to cover school teachers.

We anticipate that the details of the scheme will be finalised and a training provider identified in the next month so that the scheme can be marketed, materials prepared and staff trained to allow FE practitioners and school teachers to apply for sabbaticals before the end of the year.

I will provide a further report to Committee before Easter

NPFS and Welsh/ Bilingual Learning

Under the proposed NPFS the Learning Activity Area Weight (LAAW) is to be increased to 1.5 comparable with the weighting given to ESOL. Arguments have been made that the weighting should increase to 2 (in accordance with the recommendation within the NFER report) in order to generate sufficient funding to secure increased participation rates. If enrolment numbers stay as they are, a weighting of 1.5 would mean an allocation of £4.56 million for 2005-06 [as compared to £3.84 million currently].

ELWa commissioned a research project to determine both where, and to what extent, additional costs were incurred by Welsh language provision. The report indicates that there is little difference between Welsh Medium and Bilingual provision (both requiring an uplift of about one quarter) but that where a particular cohort of students is split to create both a Welsh Medium and an English Medium class, there is a significantly higher cost.

In conjunction with the increase in LAAW, ELWa is planning to use the Learning Network strand of the NPFS to fund infrastructure developments and capacity building. Bilingual learning is a component of this strand. ELWa's Bilingual Learning Unit has a budget of £2.6m for the FY 2005-06.

Special Educational Needs

We are continuing to develop our policies in relation to additional learning needs to ensure all children have a flying start and barriers to learning are removed to ensure equality of opportunity. We will continue to move towards the key principle set out in the Special Education Needs Code of Practice for Wales that all children who have special educational needs will have those needs met.

Inclusive Education: following consultation on draft guidance issued in December 2003, the guidance has now been expanded to ensure the needs of all children with additional learning needs are covered in the final document. We are working with a range of stakeholders to ensure we develop robust policies in

this area.

Regional Provision: the Education Act 2002 contains the necessary powers to enable regional collaboration.

The first regional autistic spectrum disorder facility in Wales has now been established in North Wales at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn in Denbighshire. Provision for pupils in South East Wales with Aspergers Syndrome is being developed at a secondary resource unit at Fairwater Comprehensive School in Torfaen.

We are currently in discussion with local authorities to facilitate collaborative arrangements for the delivery of special needs services in other areas of Wales. Guidance will be issued for consultation in 2005.

Speech and Language: a speech and language joint co-ordinator post is being established within the Assembly Government in January 2005. Pilot projects to facilitate and trial a joint commissioning and pooled budget approach within integrated services for both health and education professionals will be up and running from April 2005.

In due course integrated teams of speech and language therapists, teachers with specialist qualifications in speech and language and LSAs will be developed to work together to jointly assess and meet pupil needs.

Sensory Impairment: in December 2004 the Assembly published its final consultation document on multi sensory impairment which completes the trilogy of sensory impairment guidance documents. The documents set out standards for the delivery of services to children and young people with sensory impairments and suggest a regional approach. Final guidance will be issued during the Summer Term 2005 encapsulating standards for children with Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment and Multi Sensory Impairment.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder: a joint strategy is currently being developed across health and education for the delivery of services to children and adults with ASD. I anticipate a first draft of this document should be available early in 2005.

Attendance and Disaffection

The Welsh Assembly Government approach to tackling attendance issues has been informed by the work of the Attendance Task and Finish Group. The Group published its report in February 2003. Progress on the recommendations includes:

- simplifying the guidance on classification of absences making it easier for schools to record attendance;

- collection of statistics on attendance at primary schools has been collected since spring 2004 (previously, only data from secondary schools was collected);
- establishment of two advisory groups:
 - The Long Term Advisory Working Group meets on a regular basis to provide advice to the Attendance Task Group.
- process of taking attendance cases through the courts and producing a guidance document;
- the first national truancy sweep at the end of September 2003 involving all Welsh LEAs and police forces. Its aim was to raise the profile of the issue of attendance at school. A further national sweep will take place during this school year.
- holding a conference on attendance and behaviour in June 2004 to highlight and share good practice.

An attendance benchmarking system for schools is being introduced early in 2005. £6 million funding will be made available over the next 3 years for electronic attendance packages for schools across Wales.

The Better Schools Fund made available £5.85m to local education authorities in 2004-05 for pupil support, which was largely for the funding of projects to address behaviour and attendance issues. We are also providing £500,000 each year from 2002-03 to 2004-05 to fund 10 pilot projects to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to address pupil disengagement. Good practice from these pilots will be disseminated and inform future policy development.

We are currently reviewing National Assembly Circular 3/99 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion' which provides guidance on a range of school-based actions to address pupil disaffection and challenge behaviour difficulties and poor attendance. A revised circular is expected to go out for consultation shortly.

Since 1999 there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of sessions missed due to pupil absenteeism, from 10.6% in 1999 to 9.4% in 2004.

Teacher Workload/Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens

The Committee welcomed signing of the National Agreement on Raising

Standards and Tackling Workload in January 2003 in its report on the School of the Future. Since then, two phases of the contractual changes aimed at reducing teachers' workload and giving them a better work/life balance have come into effect. Teachers no longer have to undertake administrative and

clerical tasks, and there is an annual limit of 38 hours on covering for absent colleagues. These changes mean teachers have more time to focus on their professional duties of teaching and learning, leading to higher standards of pupil achievement.

The Assembly Government has worked closely with the other signatories and with LEAs in Wales to support schools in implementing the agreement. A network of LEA change co-ordinators has been set up to provide help and advice to schools on the contractual changes. Training has also been provided in 'change management' techniques to help schools develop strategies to deliver the agreement according to their own needs and circumstances and making the best use of all available resources.

The Education (Specified Work and Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2004 were made by the Assembly in July 2004 and provide the statutory basis to help schools implement the agreement by giving them flexibility to deploy support staff in new roles in support of teachers, provided they are suitably skilled and always supervised by a teacher.

This work has been supported with £33m funding provided through the local government revenue settlement in 2004-05. In 2005-06, a further £25m will be allocated to help schools continue to implement the Agreement including the provision of training for support staff. On present plans, funding will rise by another £12m to £70m in 2006-07.

Alongside action to reduce teachers' workload I have taken fresh action to tackle unnecessary bureaucracy in schools by setting up the School Workload Advisory Panel (SWAP). The SWAP is a panel of six independent practitioners who will review existing and future policies affecting schools and advise on ways to reduce or minimise their bureaucratic impact.

IT in Teaching and Learning

The Welsh Assembly Government will be working with LEAs and others over the coming year on the development of an ICT strategy for schools in Wales. The strategy will focus on teaching and learning and how these can be effectively supported by ICT, but will also cover a number of other practical issues including sustainable funding and best value procurement.

National Grid for Learning – NGfL Cymru has been established for nearly two years providing high quality bilingual online teaching and learning resources. Early in 2004 the Innovation Schools Fund was launched providing the opportunity for teachers to develop their own ideas for web based content.

Broadband Lifelong Learning Network: the Assembly has provided funding over the past three years to assist local authorities to connect all schools, public libraries and ICT learning centres into this national broadband network. Funding has also been provided for technical support and advisory posts in each authority in order to help develop the effective use of the network.

By October 2004, 99% of secondary schools, 88% of primary schools, and 91% of ICT learning centres

had been connected to the Lifelong Learning Network. We are monitoring on a monthly basis progress to achieving 100% connectivity at the benchmark levels. of 8mb connectivity into secondary schools and 2mb into primary. Figures for December showed that 203/229 secondary schools and 1122/1659 primary & special schools had achieved the benchmark levels.

Utilising e-learning technology (other ICT teaching and learning developments): support has been provided to develop a web-based awareness raising programme for teachers on special educational needs. We are also engaged with a European funded programme, led by the Welsh Dyslexia Project, to build an exemplar web-based training approach for those teaching and supporting dyslexic pupils.

We are looking at new ways to achieve effective practitioner development through technology. In 2005 training for teachers involved in the new Foundation Phase will use e-learning techniques alongside conventional methods, where the former have been identified as the most effective in reaching large numbers of individuals quickly.

The School ICT Asset Database: the database has been designed to provide the Assembly Government, and its local authority partners, with information on the current provision of ICT equipment in schools. It is intended that this will help inform future ICT procurement arrangements; initiatives to improve ICT provision; and enhancements to LEA guidance on maintenance and technical support.

Continuing Professional Development for Teachers

CPD is at the heart of the Assembly Government's strategy to raise professional standards and thereby to raise the level of pupil achievement. The Assembly Government has a strong commitment to strengthening teachers' continuing professional development and particularly to ensuring that it is tailored to the needs of individual teachers and the needs of the schools in which they work.

Since July 2001, the GTC has been administering a range of individually focussed CPD projects, which focus on the individual professional development needs of teachers on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Council's CPD programme, which was administered on a pilot basis for three years, has proved very popular with teachers and schools alike. Given this success, the programme was put on a permanent footing from 1 April 2004 with the GTCW responsible for the delivery and funding of the programme.

Since 2001, the Welsh Assembly Government has allocated over £13m to the GTCW to support its CPD programme. To date over 19,000 development opportunities have been funded and uptake continues to be high.

Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools

The report of Phase I of this important study undertaken jointly with the WLGA looked at the experience of secondary schools that have demonstrated that deprivation and poor performance do not

have to go together. It was published in October 2002 and the study findings were widely disseminated over the following 12 months. Phase II looking at primary schools commenced in 2003 and is nearing completion. A meeting of the Steering Group of which I and Peter Black AM are members is due to be held in February to consider the draft report. Publication of the final report is anticipated in mid 2005.

Voice for Pupils in School Provision

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that children and young people have a voice on issues that affect them.

We have established and are supporting Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales as well as Youth Forums in each local authority area to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in democratic decision making throughout Wales. We are also developing work on participation within the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that Young People's voices are listened to and acted upon as part of our work.

In 2003 we consulted on making school councils a statutory requirement for primary, secondary and special schools and on guidance for governing bodies and LEAs on consulting pupils about decisions which affect them. In the light of the consultation exercise regulations on schools councils will be made this year and guidance on pupil participation and schools councils will be issued.

I will also very shortly be consulting on draft guidance for governing bodies on the handling of complaints involving pupils. The consultation document will cover handling of complaints relating to child abuse, including complaints about abuse unrelated to the school setting and will take account of the recommendations in the Clywch inquiry report.

School Buildings

The Assembly Government has a commitment to ensuring that by 2010 all schools are housed in buildings fit for teaching and learning in the 21st century. There is still a considerable way to go but we are ensuring that funding of £560m will be provided during the lifetime of this Assembly. Funding will rise to over £140m annually from 2005-06 and be sustained at that level until at least the end of the decade. The Assembly's recently approved budget provides for funding of £143m next financial year and beyond. This total does not include Assembly support for PFI schemes. A number of these are due to come into use in 2005-06 and beyond.

We are currently assessing local authorities' asset management plans to identify future funding needs. Local Education Authorities are required to manage the growing numbers of surplus school places in the interests of focusing resources on high quality education provision for all pupils. The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee completed a review on the supply of school places early in 2001, confirming that there was surplus capacity to be addressed in both primary and secondary schools in Wales. A growing number of authorities are now grasping the nettle and demonstrating their commitment

to tackle surplus places to ensure high quality provision in modern or modernised buildings. Authorities are also providing buildings that meet their responsibilities to improve access for disabled pupils. In the next year or so we will be working with authorities to encourage them to adopt the recently developed BRREAM standards for sustainability in school buildings. New requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 contains a duty on LEAs and schools to plan to increase progressively the accessibility of schools. This will help LEAs and schools to improve access in a planned and strategic way and in so doing enable disabled pupils to develop their full potential in accordance with the principles set out in The Learning Country. We shall also be exploring sustainability issues with local government within the context of the continuing development of the Assembly Government's sustainability action plan including the application of BREEAM standards for public buildings including schools.

Community Focused Schools

Community focused schools were not in the list of issues included in my statement of response to the Committee's report though the relationship of schools with the communities they serve was an important consideration in the previous committees conclusions. At the time of my Statement we had just consulted on draft guidance to assist schools and their key partners in developing a community focus. The final guidance was published in December 2003. I have taken every opportunity to communicate the Assembly Government's vision for schools at the heart of their communities.

For 2005-06 and in each of the following two years we will be providing £2m for the development of community focused schools and a further £1m specifically targeted at small and rural schools. I am looking to fund exemplar schemes that can either be used elsewhere as models of good practice or to provide start up funding for initiatives. I will be consulting on the criteria for the use of the funding shortly.

7. Maastricht Conference

On 15 December I attended a conference on 'Strengthening European Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training' in Maastricht.

The conference, which was organised as part of a programme of joint events on VET during the Dutch Presidency of the EU, was focused on the urgent need to improve the skills levels of European citizens and to move VET up the Lisbon agenda. It attracted participants from Member States and regional governments across Europe. I represented both Wales and EARLALL and also stood in for Charles Clarke during the closing panel discussion.

Encouragingly, the event demonstrated that Wales is on the right track with existing initiatives such as ILA Wales, 14-19 Learning Pathways and the Credit Qualification Framework for Wales. Through my participation in this conference I was able to highlight the importance of the regions in furthering the Copenhagen process, and to make the point that in many member states, responsibility for developing

education and skills is devolved to regional and local governments. I spoke about the many benefits that improving skill levels can bring and particularly referred to the need for the Copenhagen process and the new Integrated Lifelong Learning programme to include hard to reach and at risk groups. The event provided an excellent opportunity for raising the profile of both Wales and EARLALL in EU circles.

During the margins of the conference the Education Minister for Luxembourg, Maddy Delvaux Stehres and I agreed to begin planning a joint event on best practice within Vocational Education and Training during the Luxembourg presidency which starts this month. My officials will be progressing this over the coming months.

8. Publication of SEAP 2005

Following public consultation and a written statement to the Assembly, the Skills and Employment Action Plan 2005 (replacing the first plan issued in February 2002), was published on 11 January. It sets out a comprehensive, evidence-based programme to raise the levels of skilled employment in Wales, with the following objectives:

- Improve the mechanisms of workforce development;
- Supply new entrants to the labour market with the skills needed for employment;
- Work with employers and employees to improve skills;
- Help more people into sustained employment.

This agenda is highly relevant to the whole education and lifelong learning portfolio. Most learners are either in work or will be seeking work in the future. So, while acquiring skills for employment is not the only purpose of learning, it is a major part of it; and we have good research on what employers are looking for. This action plan, therefore, has important lessons for schools, further and higher education as well as for learning in the workplace. It takes forward the key findings of ELWa's review of learning in and for the workplace.

It also plays a vital part in meeting our economic development objectives and I was delighted that Andrew Davies could join me at the launch on 11 January, together with Sheila Drury, Roger Jones and Roger Evans from Ina Bearings. A particular focus in the Action Plan is achieving joined-up delivery of high quality, flexible support for businesses in Wales, covering help with learning as well as other support such as that from the WDA. With the merger of ELWa and WDA with the Assembly Government we have created an excellent opportunity to take forward this joined-up approach and to create some early wins for Making the Connections for delivering better public services in Wales.

We will continue to work through the Future Skills Wales Partnership to implement the Action Plan.

This Partnership includes a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector bodies with an interest in skills and employment. We are also taking the joined-up approach seriously within the Government: a Cabinet sub-committee on Jobs and Skills has been formed, and I will be having annual bilateral meetings with my Cabinet colleagues to discuss skills issues in their portfolios. In addition, I have agreed with the Economic Development Minister that we will jointly chair twice-yearly meetings of key partners in order to ensure top-level co-ordination, take stock of progress, and identify emerging issues that need attention.

9. School Transport Bill

The School Transport Bill will allow a limited number of local authorities in England and Wales to pilot innovative school transport schemes which would make more comprehensive school transport provision than at present. To cover the costs of such enhanced provision, local authorities would be able to make a modest charge to pupils, except for pupils from low income families. Scheme proposals in Wales will require Assembly approval and will need to take account of the prospectus to be issued by the Assembly once the legislation has been enacted.

Third Reading and Report stage in the House of Commons took place on 16 December. A total of 27 amendments were tabled, including nine government amendments following consideration of views expressed during Commons Committee stage.

The first set of government amendments proposed removing the requirement for LEAs to seek the consent of the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales to revoke their school transport scheme, in keeping with the deregulatory spirit of the Bill. A further amendment was proposed to place the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales under an obligation to issue guidance for scheme authorities in England and Wales respectively. The prospectus, which would be issued to LEAs, would thus be placed on a statutory footing. As the prospectus would be able to cover issues relating to the amendment of school travel schemes, the associated regulation making power for the Assembly in paragraph 10 of Schedule 35B of the Bill was no longer needed and a further amendment was proposed removing that provision.

All nine government amendments were agreed. The amended Bill and Explanatory Notes are available on the UK Parliament website at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/pabills.htm>

The Bill was subsequently introduced to the House of Lords on 20 December. Second Reading in the Lords is likely to take place on 31 January 2005 and Royal Assent is expected in April 2005.

10. Inspection Arrangements for Education Outside the Classroom

Background.

At the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 10 November 2004 there was discussion on

education provided outside of the classroom. It was agreed that the quality of education was important in settings other than schools, including hospital and home tuition, and I undertook to provide details of the inspection arrangements for such provision.

Legal Position

Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 requires LEAs to make arrangements for the provision of suitable full-time or part-time education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not be able to receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them. In this context, "suitable education" means "efficient education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs".

Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 provides powers for Estyn, as part of LEA inspections, to inspect provision of education "for persons of compulsory school age - whether at school or otherwise". Prior to the Education Act 2002, Estyn's powers of entry for the purposes of inspection under Section 10 of the 1997 Act were limited to the premises of the LEA being inspected and its maintained schools. Section 180 of the Education 2002, extended Estyn's right of entry to any other premises (except private homes) where education is provided by an LEA under Section 19 of the 1996 Act.

The Chief Inspector, therefore, has powers to arrange for any local education authority (LEA) to be inspected including any provision made by the authority irrespective of location. This includes provision in hospitals. [Because of the approach to LEA inspection that Estyn have taken in the past, they have tended to look at strategic approaches to EOTAS (education otherwise than at school)– i.e: planning, structures, processes etc. rather than the detail of service delivery. This was partly as a result of time constraints and the breadth of LEA work. This is likely to change in the future with more 'dipping into' actual provision as a way of sampling actual experience and outcomes for individual learners.]

Estyn may also inspect any LEA if asked to do so by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Inspection Arrangements

After 2001, arrangements for Estyn inspections of local education authorities were built upon Best Value requirements and approaches. The Audit Commission collaborates with Estyn on LEA inspections in accordance with Section 41 of the Education Act 1997.

Inspections under Section 38 focus on the four main areas of LEA activity- strategic management, support for school improvement, provision for pupils with special educational needs and access to education (until recently, these areas were commonly referred to as the 'fair funding' areas).

Estyn inspects most LEAs once in each financial year. Each LEA inspection usually focuses on at least one major area of activity that has already been the subject of a self-evaluation process by the LEA. In addition, the Chief Inspector may also arrange for a full inspection of an LEA at any time.

Education in settings other than the school.

Provision by LEAs for education other than at school for children is very wide ranging and is provided through a variety of services including for example education in hospitals, Pupil Referral Units, the Education Welfare Service, Youth Access, Behaviour Support Service, Youth Offending Teams and Home Tuition service. For the purposes of inspection of such provision, Estyn has right of entry to any premises (except a private home) where Section 19 education is provided.

Recent inspection reports of Section 19 provision can be found on Estyn's website (www.estyn.gov.uk). A number have focused specifically on provision for those not in school. For example, "Newport: Best Value Review - Inspection of education otherwise than at school (EOTAS), Estyn March 2003". In this inspection Estyn gave attention to the provision made by the local education authority in a range of settings including the Pupil Referral Unit and the Pollards Well Psychiatric Unit. It also looked at the support provided by local authority teams including the Home Tuition service, education welfare service, behaviour support service, and Youth Offending Team.

Recent inspections that have addressed aspects of provision for those not in school include:

- Powys: Best Value Review – Early Years, attendance, behaviour, and exclusion services, inspected by Estyn in November 2003.
- Rhondda Cynon Taff: Best Value Review - Access and Inclusion Service, inspected by Estyn in November 2003.
- Isle of Anglesey: Inspection of Llangefni Pupil Referral Unit (under Section 10, of the School Inspection Act 1996), February 2002

In addition the Assembly Government has commissioned Estyn to undertake a thematic survey of Pupil Referral Units and similar provision. All PRUs are liable to inspection as a type of school or as a part of education provided otherwise by an LEA. The survey is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2005 and will inform work being undertaken on the definition and registration of PRUs. Consultation on this issue will undertaken as part of the planned revision of the Assembly's Pupil Support and Inclusion Guidance.

Development of the Inspection arrangements

Estyn is currently consulting on new arrangements, including the development of a new inspection Framework, for inspection of LEAs under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

As Best Value reviews have been replaced by the Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) it is now appropriate to bring inspection arrangements into closer alignment with WPI. Estyn's proposals

incorporate the following elements:

- programmes of individual LEAs will be taken into account in the scheduling of inspections, and LEAs will have a choice as to whether discrete inspections within a 4-year inspection period will focus on all, or some, of the LEA's work falling within Section 38.
- self-evaluation, peer assessment and the opportunities for individual LEAs to respond to inspection findings will have greater prominence. This reflects the approach that responsibility for improvement lies primarily with LEAs themselves.
- prior to the commencement of an inspection, a risk assessment to determine areas of least strong performance- related closely to WPI- would be carried out. This would enable greater fine-tuning of the inspection process and more efficient use of Estyn's resources, and, clearly, closer alignment with WPI generally.

An important aspect of the proposals is that they would introduce a new framework for the inspection of LEAs under Section 38. Estyn believe that the new arrangements would provide a means of assessing LEAs which is more broad-ranging, flexible and provides better linkage with the Wales Programme for Improvement.

Under Estyn's proposals, all or most of LEAs' work, including provision for education otherwise than at school, would be inspected in the course of inspection cycles, facilitating the development of an overview of the work of individual LEAs.

The consultation period ended on 10th January 2005. Subject to the results of the consultation, Estyn intend that the new arrangements will be fully in place by April 2006.