

## European and External Affairs Committee, 14 April 2005 - Information Paper From Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

### European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning

1. This paper sets out the history and activities of the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning, the role that the Welsh Assembly Government plays in the Association and the future plans of the organisation.

#### Background

2. The European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL) is a network of 17 European regions that work in partnership on the development of new policies, strategies and methods for lifelong learning. The Association was established in 2001, with Wales as a founder member, and since its inception has worked to share knowledge and best practice and to facilitate joint developmental projects and activities between member regions. The Association also serves as a platform for member regions to comment collectively on policy development within the European Union, and over the last year, particularly, has been progressing its political ambitions as an influencing body.

#### Membership

3. The Association boasts membership from across Europe and includes representation from Italy, Spain, Germany, Sweden and Denmark, as well as the UK. The membership of a district of Latvia ensures that at least one of the new Member States is represented, and the inclusion of regions from within Norway and Bulgaria ensures that non-EU states also have a voice within the Association. The UK presence in EARLALL was strengthened in 2003 when Scotland made the decision to join the Association.

4. Wales has actively worked to increase the number of member regions within EARLALL. As a result of direct approaches by the Welsh Assembly Government both Baden-Württemberg and Brittany are expected to join in September 2005. Brittany will be the first region of France to join the Association and this is seen as a significant step in increasing EARLALL's influence across the EU.

5. As a result of this expansion, EARLALL's membership will soon include two of the prestigious 'Four

Motor Regions', Catalunya and Baden-Württemberg, as well as Wales and Scotland who are closely associated with the Four Motors process. There has also recently been an indication that the Rhône-Alpes region of France might be considering the possibility of applying to join.

6. A full list of current and prospective members is at Annex A.

## **Wales' role in EARLALL**

7. Wales was one of the founder members of EARLALL and I have taken as active a role as possible within the Association. In September 2003, I was elected as one of the two Vice Presidents of the Association and in that role I have worked to

increase EARLALL membership by writing to a number of regions with whom Wales has Memoranda of Understanding in place, outlining the benefits that membership of EARLALL might offer. The interest shown by Baden-Württemberg and Brittany in joining the Association is a direct result of that approach.

## **EARLALL Activity**

8. Membership of EARLALL provides Wales with a whole host of opportunities for partnership working. Since its inception, regions from within the Association have worked together on a variety of both EU and non EU funded lifelong learning projects including one which tested the scope for transfer ('valorisation') of a number of Leonardo programme 'products' from one part of Europe to another. Wales has also drafted a number of key proposals relating to the development of the Association.

## **Project Work**

9. As part of the Leonardo programme 'Women in Management' project, Wales played host to seven Swedish female hospital managers in October 2004 and provided a range of activities with the assistance of the NHS in Wales and the Centre for Health Leadership. Wales is also currently working with partners in the Basque Country and Tuscany on a project which seeks to test the scope for identifying common occupational standards and competencies for particular jobs, starting with cooking and concrete fabrication.

10. Further joint development projects in progress or in prospect include two promoted by Tuscany: one regarding the development of individual learning accounts (to which Wales is contributing the benefits of its experience) and another to assess the scope for mapping common competencies within the vocational qualification frameworks of the respective regions. Wales is also involved in a project that, if approved by Leonardo, will focus on the creation of practitioner contacts and an information database for bench marking and knowledge transfer purposes. Work is also ongoing on the development of a Wales-led Leonardo project proposal that would seek to develop the creditisation of post graduate learning.

## **Adult Education**

11. Wales has taken the lead within EARLALL on the theme of Adult Learning, and in March 2004 hosted a seminar in Brussels entitled 'Adult Education: A Future in Europe?'. The seminar provided a useful forum through which policy makers and practitioners from throughout Europe were able to discuss the many challenges faced across Europe in the field of Adult Education. More importantly, the seminar provided an opportunity for delegates to share ideas and views on how such challenges could be overcome. We have recently forwarded the Seminar report to the Commission to flag up the recommendations that emanated from this event; and we are in the process of discussing how we can build on the success of the seminar with further events in the future.

12. Through EARLALL, Wales has good contacts with the Nordic countries in which the culture of adult learning is well-developed. We have also (through NIACE Dysgu Cymru) recently hosted a visit by adult learning practitioners from Slovenia with a view to establishing a basis for exchange of best practice with another country that has a strong tradition in the field of adult learning.

## **Valorisation conference**

13. In part because of Wales' role within EARLALL and the success of the Adult Learning seminar, the Welsh Assembly Government has been approached by the European Commission to host a conference on 'valorisation' – the dissemination and exploitation of knowledge and best practice – of EU-funded projects on education and training. This would be a Europe-wide conference of practitioners and beneficiaries held in Wales towards the end of 2005.

14. I have discussed this in outline with Commissioner Figel' and his officials and planning will now proceed - in concert with a number of partners from within Wales - on the detailed arrangements for this event. The conference will be promoted as part of the UK Presidency of the EU, in the Education and Skills programme, following our proposal to the DfES that it be included as an official UK event.

## **Engaging with the EU**

15. EARLALL has also made specific efforts to engage more closely with the EU over the last year on policy development.

16. Mr Stefan de Keersmaecker, a representative of the ESF Policy Unit at the European Commission, attended the March 2004 General Assembly meeting in Brussels, for a discussion on 'The Future of the European Social Fund'. This dialogue was particularly useful in strengthening links between EARLALL and the Commission and in raising EARLALL's profile within Commission circles. Following this dialogue, EARLALL produced the paper 'The European Social Fund post 2006: Reinforcing the local and regional dimension'. The paper (which was largely drafted by Wales) set out the Association's joint position on the importance of government involvement below the Member State level in determining the

uses to which ESF is to be put.

17. Indeed, the Association has since produced further papers over recent months regarding EU Cohesion policy, post 2006 – again largely on the basis of drafts provided by Wales. Papers include ‘Strengthening the Lifelong Learning Dimension to the European Union’s regional policy – the regional response to the Third Cohesion report’, which sets out EARLALL’s core beliefs and principles – in particular that EU cohesion policy should have a stronger lifelong learning focus and that there must be more emphasis, post 2006, on developing our citizens’ skills.

18. Another paper, ‘The New Generation of Community Education and Training Programmes after 2006’ puts forward an EARLALL common statement regarding the EU’s proposals for the generation of learning programmes for 2007-2013. These proposals outline the shape that programmes such as Grundtvig, Leonardo and Erasmus will take under the new arrangements for an integrated Lifelong Learning programme and EARLALL welcomes the fact that the arrangements should provide stronger support for the regional dimension. The EARLALL President, Paulo Benesperi, forwarded these papers to the President of the Commission as well as the relevant Commissioners in October and they were well received..

19. Efforts to engage more closely with the EU continue with the other Vice President of the Association, Mr Kent Johansson of Vastra Gotalands, due to give a presentation on the work of EARLALL to the Committee of the Regions on 21 April.

20. I met Jan Figel’, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism on 6 April, and spoke to him briefly about the work of EARLALL and Wales’ involvement within it. Furthermore, there are plans for EARLALL to hold a seminar in June which would involve key figures from the Commission, ideally Commissioner Figel’ and Alice Copette, who is responsible for the dissemination and exploitation of the results of EC funded projects (‘valorisation’) in the Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Such a seminar would focus on the enhancement of interregional co-operation within lifelong learning policy. The proposal for such a seminar directly follows the declared intention of the new Head of the Commission, Jose Barosso, to engage in a more structured dialogue with regional associations.

21. EARLALL members are also taking an increasingly high profile role in pan-European conferences. A Berlin conference on ‘Regional Partnerships in Lifelong Learning’ was attended by a number of EARLALL representatives late in 2004, and I represented EARLALL at the Maastricht Conference on Enhancing European Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training in December 2004.

## **Conclusion**

22. Membership of EARLALL is an important and practical way in which Wales can be fully involved in Europe in its own right. It provides us with an opportunity to express our regional voice and a platform on which to make that voice heard in harmony with other like-minded regions. The Association

is rapidly maturing into an active and cohesive organisation, with the potential to play an important role in shaping both policy and practice in lifelong learning throughout the European Union.

## **Annex A**

### EARLALL Membership

Current members (31 March 2005)

Andalucia (Spain)

Catalunya (Spain)

Euskadi/Pais Vasco (Basque Country) (Spain)

Illes Balears (Spain)

Livorno (Italy)

Madona (Latvia)

Marche (Italy)

Rheinland-Pfalz (Germany)

Scotland (UK)

Sogn og Fjordane (Norway)

Trento (Italy)

Toscana (Italy)

Västra Götaland (Sweden)

Vejle (Denmark)\*

Vidin (Bulgaria)

Wales (UK)

Likely additional members in 2005

Baden-Württemberg (Germany)

Bretagne (France)

\* When Vejle County is split between the planned new regions of Mid Jutland and South Denmark in 2007, both of the new regions are expected to become members