



NUT Cymru
Written Evidence to:
National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Learning Committee
Re: Transformation Agenda
29th April 2010

Purpose

To submit evidence as requested associated with the transformation agenda which are of interest to the committee.

Submission by NUT Cymru

When “Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales” was published, NUT Cymru was concerned that despite its stated aim (Para. 23) being to:-

“challenge everyone involved in the management and provision of post-compulsory education and training in Wales to work together to transform the network of providers so that we:

- widen the options available for students at 14-19 in a way that prepares young people for the full range of pathways open to them and that respects the different learning styles of those students;*
- reduce unnecessary duplication of provision by increased levels of collaborative curriculum planning and delivery; and*
- move to excellence across networks of providers, building on the progress made by individual providers in raising the quality of institutional management and of students’ learning experience.”*

There was far too much focus on the structure of the education system and insufficient attention given to the quality of provision.

Furthermore, the statement that *“there is substantial evidence to show that there are too many small school sixth forms and, in a few areas, too many secondary schools”* suggested to us that of the real agenda was to rationalize provision and close schools, a view reinforced by paragraph 24, which went on to state: *“The current delivery of education and training provision is inefficient in terms of the upkeep of excess school buildings; unnecessary 16-19 duplication of provision between schools and between schools and colleges; restricted choice for many*

learners; too many small post-16 classes in schools; and in some cases surplus places 11-16. This leads to valuable education and training funds being directed towards additional staff costs and infrastructure investment when they would be better directed at the learners and the learner experience. In addition, Estyn reports that small class sizes found in many school sixth forms leads to limited student interactions which diminishes the effectiveness of learning."

It is perhaps significant that in the guidance to parties submitting evidence, the first section is to focus on structural change. We remain concerned, therefore, that the transformation agenda is still too heavily focused on structures, not standards.

The pace of development of learning partnerships has varied in different parts of Wales. In some urban and geographically compact areas in the south there has been relatively rapid progress towards the creation of a new structure for the delivery of post-16 and/or post-14 education. However, in more rural areas of Wales structural change has been slower. In both rural and urban areas, members state that the growth in the number of partnerships has led to a parallel growth in the number of meetings and the time school and LEA leaders are spending in them. This in turn has led to greater time demands to produce action and/or development plans to meet Assembly requirements or to draw down funding.

The extent to which schools and colleges are being consulted also varies. In North West Wales, structural changes may arise from a range of options being considered as a result of the engagement of a firm of external consultants. However, until recently schools have felt themselves to be out of the loop. The detail of the proposal appears only to be known by head teachers. Many governors, teachers and local councillors remain almost completely in the dark as to proposals under consideration, some of which go well beyond the option agreed as a result of the Geographic Pathfinder process and which attempts are made to justify by a belief that the Assembly would not accept less radical proposals.

Teaching staff are yet to feel the full impact of structural changes proposed, but among the Union's concerns are:

- The potential for teacher redundancies arising from the rationalization of provision;
- The possible worsening of conditions of service if teachers are effectively made peripatetic;
- Our firm opposition to any body other than a local authority or a currently-established foundation or faith school being the employer of teachers;
- The move to flexible teaching hours and the resultant extension in both learners and teachers' working day.

One of the stated aims of reforms since the creation of ELWa has been the removal of unnecessary duplication of provision. However, the Union does not believe that anyone has yet adequately defined the meaning of “unnecessary” in this context.

Schools are obliged to consider collaboration by the Learning and Skills measure but are more effectively being obliged to collaboration by the financial constraints that they face. This is leading increasingly to uneconomic courses being rationalized and provided in a more limited number of centres. However, the Union’s longstanding position is that collaboration is often more expensive. While the cost of the additional planning meetings is often hidden, the sums spent in some areas (£60,000) on transporting learners by bus and taxi between sites is not. What is not so easily costed is the lost learning time while pupils are on the road.

Many head teachers have lost confidence in the Assembly’s ability to plan and particularly to fund post-16 provision. The 7.43% cut imposed at short notice prior to the start of the previous financial year and with complete disregard for the national funding formula, and the unfortunate way in which it was only partially restored to schools was highly damaging to the Assembly’s credibility.

While the Union has been generally supportive of the Learning Pathways initiative, we are critical of many aspects of its implementation. The Learning and Skills measure has placed additional requirements on school, several of which we believe have been inadequately thought through and resourced.

The requirement to provide at least thirty courses post-14 appears arbitrary. DCELLS officials confirm that the number was determined with reference to the number of courses which, having reviewed provision in several partnerships, could reasonably be provided, rather than as a result of evidence from learner satisfaction surveys or research on learner motivation. The figure is entirely open to the question “Why not 28, 29 31 or 32?” The issue is magnified when we contemplate the provision of such courses through the medium of Welsh.

The original proposals for an appeals system for learners who did not secure their first choice of courses are heavily bureaucratic and NUT Cymru is pleased that it was reconsidered.

There is undoubtedly a broader range of vocational courses available to learners and there is anecdotal evidence at least that learners both enjoy them and find them valuable. However, from a school’s point of view, they are often expensive to run with colleges charging per capita fees that represent a significant part of the per pupil budget delegated to the school, sometimes insisting that school staff stay on the college site to assist with supervision, levying additional fees for examination entry and invigilating pupils with ALN who require additional time

and leaving schools to pay for the transport costs. This can lead to schools spending ten times the sum on such provision that they save from the pupil being off-site. This provision is often currently funded via local 14-19 partnerships which draw down Assembly grant funding. However, the clear message from a number of providers is that when this grant funding dries up, the provision will cease as it is too costly to maintain.

We also question the emphasis on vocational courses at level 2 when many valuable courses for less able learners do not count fully towards the school's provision against the local curriculum requirements.

Local curricula are being established but the full effect on teachers has yet to be felt. It should be noted that common timetabling can lead to a restriction in choice as some smaller schools have to date been able to offer free choice of options post-16 but will not be able to do so if sharing courses in option columns scheduled across institutions.

There is also a danger that the joint provision and common timetabling will result in the key stage 3 and 4 curriculum being determined by what can be accommodated after the post-16 timetable has been set in place.

There has been some increase in the use of distance learning and video conferencing but NUT Cymru's view is that this is an option to consider when a qualified specialist teacher cannot be put in front of a class.

The introduction of the learning coaches is possibly the best example of a good idea, ill thought through and under-funded. The Assembly originally envisaged staff specifically engaged as learning coaches being appointed to schools. It provided some money for training but nowhere near enough to appoint and sustain the numbers required. Thus learning coaching has now become a practice rather than a specific role and teachers are being told that they are all learning coaches. This has been an expensive piece of wheel reinvention.

We are pleased that in many areas, LEAs are collaborating on service provision to enhance the quality and range of services available to young people. We are less convinced about the collaboration agenda at school level. The measure provides the means for the Assembly to compel schools to collaborate, seldom a good way to bring partners together, and many schools believe that unless they respond in a manner which the Assembly regards as positive, there will be adverse financial consequences. There is insufficient evidence that this model of provision is what learners want and in the Assembly's own recently published Learner Satisfaction Survey 2009 includes some interesting findings, including:

- The vast majority of Year 12 and 13 students (86%) were satisfied to some degree with the overall quality of teaching. At least seven in ten rated

teachers as fairly or very good for the support they gave, the quality and availability of teaching materials they used, the fact that they listened to students' needs, the good use of lesson time and the ability to explain the subject.

- Students involved in collaborative delivery were less satisfied with teaching (85% were satisfied to some extent compared to 88% of students whose lessons were all taught at one site).
- Levels of overall satisfaction were different at an 'all satisfied' level (79% were satisfied compared to 85% studying solely at their school sixth form).

If the learner is genuinely to be at the centre of the Assembly's policies, the above statistics should give some pause for thought.

NUT Cymru
20th April 2010